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OLIVER CONSTABLE

MILLER AND BAKER

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

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OLIVER CONSTABLE,

MILLER AND BAKER.



CHAPTER XXIII.

HARRY STANHOPE'S WANT.

OLIVER had liberally allowed Harry Stanhope six months in which to ride his hobby and grow sick beyond endurance of his *rôle* of yeoman.

But whereas Harry had entered on the character, on a fine summer afternoon, in the attractive prospect of hay-making, corn-cutting, and hop-picking, it was midwinter, with no more agreeable occupations in view than thrash-

ing corn, pulling turnips, turning over potatoes in the pits, and ploughing a stiff clay soil under the murky sky of a short day in muggy weather, still he showed no signs of throwing up the part in satiety and disgust.

True, he had sufficient leisure to join the other farmers in presenting himself in the hunting field, and enjoying as good mounts and glorious runs as the squires or the M.F.H. himself.

It did not come under the head of sport. Harry was persuaded it lay at the core of his business, that he should attend—not only the Friarton Market, but every market within a day's journey. He went to them no longer in his shirt sleeves, or riding a bare-backed horse as it had been taken to the watering, not even in the market cart in which he had prefigured Horry and himself crossing country—out of sight, and therefore out of danger of wounding the feelings of their aristocratic relations.

Harry had modified so far his Robinson Crusoe and Vicar of Wakefield notions, as to have set up a trap handsome enough to have been driven by any of his cousins. The trap was matched by an equally well-bred, delicate, costly horse, which Harry candidly admitted was not quite 'the cheese' for a yeoman. Yet why not, if he rented and paid the rent of the paddock in which it ran, afforded the corn for its feeds, and took care that it should do his work in running like the wind with him and Horry to the innumerable markets and sales which the brothers found themselves forced to attend. Harry's pride ended with his equipage. He was not to say guilty of affability; he was every man's man, in the streets, or corn exchanges, or commercial inns where the farmers congregated. He was as ready to sit with the last man in the bar-parlour, and try return races against his trap, as to compare samples of grain in legitimate business. Harry

was all things to all men—not to gain some for what he fervently believed their good, but in sheer sociality—with a vain, light-hearted, light-headed love of popularity, which was at this time his ruling passion. Horace never thwarted his brother in this or any other inclination. He remained the abiding shadow inseparable from Harry's sunshine, and in some respects a relief from its glare.

Harry was also able to derive no small amount of animation and amusement from such windfalls in the day's routine, as brisk bouts of ratting when a stack was being pulled down, or in the granary after it was left empty ; and he waited religiously every evening on the feeding of the cattle and horses in the sheds and stables.

Harry was an extremely indulgent, if totally inconsiderate, and occasionally capricious, master, whose lavish tolerance was only now and then broken, like the abounding calm of tropical seas, by a storm violent as it was brief.

That Harry spoilt his retainers horribly was not an objection which his servants were likely to take into account in the first flush of 'the young squire's' popularity. For in spite of Harry Stanhope's well-nigh nettled protests and vigorous acting of his part, probably because of his over-acting, the would-be yeoman was the young squire to his labourers, who in the middle of their stolidity were not altogether without shrewd observation and sound deduction.

Harry not only continued unexpectedly constant to his vocation as he believed it, he remained faithful to the earliest friendship he had claimed on his arrival at Copley Grange Farm. He went more frequently to Friarton Mill than to any other house where he was made welcome, which was saying a good deal, seeing that Harry's life, whether in the way of his business requirements, or when he might be supposed clear of their urgent obligations, was a

constant round of varied visiting. Indeed, it struck Oliver that Harry grossly abused his privilege, and came intolerably often, and at absurdly unconventional seasons, from 'early morn to dewy eve'—sometimes in the raw air before breakfast, sometimes through a setting-in snowstorm after supper—to the mill-house, during this winter.

But what could Oliver do? not turn out the thoughtless lad for whom the elder man had a sneaking kindness, or close the doors against the soullessly jolly young face, which, however provocative of censure, always brought with it, when it flashed upon the man, a reflection of unimpaired freshness, and unburdened lightness of heart.

Since Fan allowed these intrusions, and even seemed to enjoy them, what was left for Oliver save to shrug his shoulders, grumble to himself, or deliver the silent hint of turning his back, after the first greeting, on his visitors?

For, of course, Harry dragged over Horry in his train. And Oliver often left Fan to entertain the two in one, while he read on uncere- moniously at the newspaper or book with which he had been engaged on their entrance.

Alas! Harry only took the cavalier rude- ness for friendliest encouragement. ‘Don’t apologise to me, old fellow,’ he would enjoin the master of the house, cheerfully. ‘It is not you I have come to see, it is Miss Constable,’ Harry would say audaciously. ‘I have come to report myself to Miss Constable. She has been so good as to take me in hand. She is making a man—that is a veritable yeoman, of me.’

And Fan lent herself to this egregious fiction. Fan, who had never interested herself in a single detail of her father and brother’s trades, who had not so much as made an exception in favour of the chicks, directed a charmed ear to all Harry Stanhope’s chatter of

the prices in the market, the field which was sown that day, the ox which had choked itself and been brought round in its stall the night before, the first long-legged, big-headed calf which he had bought for a song.

Sally Pope grinned at Oliver behind the backs of this most practical young couple.

Horace Stanhope began to fidget and glance jealously at the master of the house in his obliviousness. But not even the phenomena of Harry's coming at last, once or twice, without his brother, and showing some slight self-consciousness when the unusual omission was remarked upon, roused the suspicions of the too secure and single-minded host.

One fine frosty night Harry had walked in alone, uninvited and unannounced. For Fan's carefully-trained housemaid had become weary of announcing the perpetual visitor, and, without any rebuke from her mistress, had proceeded to treat the special duty as a work of

supererogation where Mr. Harry Stanhope was concerned.

Oliver had nodded and sat still in the shade at his father's desk, turning over some papers, keeping his post mainly to preserve the liberty of pursuing his own train of reflections ; while Harry Stanhope and Fan had put their heads together over the lamp on Fan's little table in the chimney-corner, and were, according to Oliver's conception of the situation, going over the best plans for growing corn and rearing stock, and—what was adding insult to injury in reference to Oliver's pets, the ducks—the latest contrivances for a high development of poultry. Not satisfied with the solution of these momentous problems by lamp-light, when the pair went to the window to predict from the purple-blue sky and the glitter of the stars hung like lamps of heaven in the dark branches of the trees of Copley Grange Park, the weather to-morrow—whether skating on the

mill-pond would be the order of the day, or whether the frost would give way and the scent hold, so that Harry might join the hunt ten miles off—it seemed to Oliver as if they must have started afresh to answer the whole code of agricultural questions over again, by starlight, till his patience was reduced to a shred.

At last Harry took his departure somewhat abruptly in the end.

Oliver stretched himself with vicious emphasis, and growled, this was insufferable, he did not think he could stand it much longer.

Fan, generally so quick in retort, said nothing, but she appeared to have appropriated the observation and taken it to heart; for a moment later, when she came to bid Oliver good-night, she suddenly put her hands upon his shoulders and looked wistfully in his face with tears in her dark eyes, and her colour wavering—as he remarked with surprise. ‘ You are not

angry, Oliver, dear?' she said, with one of her rare caressing gestures and phrases, which coming as they did unlooked for, from a high-spirited almost hard little woman like Fan, were apt to sap a man's defences, and melt his heart like wax on the spot. 'You are not angry, Oliver?' repeated Fan with a slight quaver in the wistful earnestness of her voice.

'Of course I am not angry with *you*, you goose of a Fanchen?' said Oliver with affectionate bluster. 'How can you help Stanhope's unconscionable coolness, which begins to be rank impudence? But why, in the name of justice, should I blame you for his faults?' enquired Oliver in all simplicity. 'You are compelled to listen to his rigmarole in your own house, when I turn him over to you. I own I ought not to do it, to such an extent,' admitted Oliver, contritely; 'but the young wretch is so indefatigable in preying on our hospitality, and has acquired such a fatal

fluency in airing his farming bosh, that I must have some relief, or knock him down. I often admire your powers of endurance, but don't give the beggar too much line, Fan, if you love me. I am not sure, whether, after all, his class are the finest judges of courtesy.'

Fan had flushed crimson at her brother's words. She knitted her delicate brows—black brows at the same time, and then as if she had thought better of it, her lips parted in a half-smile. 'No, no; don't speak treason either of me, or of another,' she said; and then she added, a little incoherently, 'I believe there is nobody so good and kind as you are, yourself, Oliver, in the whole world. Remember I have said so, though we quarrelled some time ago, and may quarrel again. Remember I have told you that you are always my own dear good boy, whom I have loved all through our lives, whom I love with all my heart at this moment, whom I could have

served, if you would have let me,' and Fan fairly hugged Oliver, who resisted stoutly in his mystification, with a dim apprehension that he might otherwise pledge himself to something he did not in the least understand.

‘What do you mean?’ cried Oliver. ‘Is Fan also among the wheedlers? For what mighty boon can she deign to wheedle?’

‘Never mind, it is too late to ask me now—good night.’

Fan succeeded in making her retreat, and in the act of doing so, Oliver might have seen, if he had been quick at reading women’s faces, that all the soft relenting and indescribable yearning which had been in hers a moment ago, had vanished and was replaced by such unmingled exultation that the girl looked radiant.

It was the last loving altercation which passed between the brother and sister for many a day.

The next morning, Harry Stanhope wound up his offences against domestic privacy by re-appearing at Friarton Mill, as if he had slept at the gate, seeking admission to Oliver before the latter had completed his toilet. Only the most urgent business could warrant such pressing attendance. Harry himself, in his superb self-complacency and confidence, betrayed, nevertheless, a shadow of a doubt of his reception.

‘You will think I am always here, Constable?’ he said with a confused laugh.

‘Well, you are here pretty often,’ the aggrieved Oliver put it mildly. ‘I am afraid your other engagements must suffer from your paying us the compliment of being so much at Friarton Mill; and your brother—he is not with you this morning—will miss you.’

‘Oh! hang Horry!’ exclaimed Harry hastily; ‘no, I don’t mean that, of course, and old Horry won’t stand in the way. He’s all

right. Besides, if one's father and mother, when a fellow possesses them, an't counted, a brother can't have much to say either way, can he?'

'I don't know what you're after,' said Oliver in perfect sincerity. 'If I were a supernumerary in an old play, I ought to exclaim, "Anan," to that last enigmatical sentence of yours.'

'Well, it ain't easy to come out with it,' protested Harry, struggling with what was, for him, the most extraordinary hesitation. 'Your sister, Constable—you must have seen she has been goodness itself to me. I know she will have to furnish the brains and backbone, for my head-piece ain't worth much, and my pluck is of the rough and ready sort, but since she graciously consents to do for me and Harry—to make a true farmer's wife, which will be an inestimable advantage to us—I may take it that you will not have any great objection to accepting me for a brother-in-law?'

‘ Stanhope, have you lost your wits ? ’ burst out Oliver. ‘ Come, there must be no more of this absurd nonsense. I tell you I will have no such foolish jesting where my sister is concerned.’

‘ Never was farther from jesting in my life ! ’ declared poor Harry indignantly.

‘ Then let me say, once for all, you must get rid of this idiotic idea. It won’t do. My sister is not for a fellow like you. I don’t want to hurt your feelings, but you have somehow tumbled into the hugest blunder, and I must speak out. I can answer for Fan : she did not dream of encouraging such a vain delusion, she will be terribly vexed and annoyed. This comes of masquerading and making-believe. It seems to me you don’t want a wife for twenty years to come : when you do, take my advice —if you will excuse me for offering it, after what I have said—marry strictly within your own class ; you of all fellows require such a

safeguard, and the more influential your wife's people, the better both for her and you!' muttered Oliver *sotto voce*. Then he resumed aloud, 'Wait till you can persuade a lady to share your lot—if you will cultivate prudence, you may make it not a bad one—as a gentleman-farmer.'

Harry was looking at Oliver with such a strong sense of superior knowledge and wisdom that it disarmed any rising resentment on the lad's part, at the tone of provoked disdainful repudiation of the proposal which Oliver could not help betraying. The contrast between the truth as Harry realised it and Oliver's undoubting convictions, brought out the comic element in the affair so dear to Harry's boyish heart, even in the serious mood which had been on him, when he 'declared his intentions.'

'Make-believe, indeed!' cried Harry, lightly; 'who plays at being miller and baker?'

‘Not I!’ denied Oliver hotly. ‘I have taken up my father’s business, which is no unusual thing for a tradesman’s son to do, and I have not adopted it as a mere makeshift, or as the last resource for a man who would otherwise be idle; I desire to make it the object of my life; I do not think any honest trade is unworthy of the dedication of the trader’s talents to render it as good in every respect as possible. I trust to do no discredit to my father’s business.’

‘At least you need not be so cocky over other people whose fathers had not the luck to be in trade,’ remonstrated Harry. ‘As to not wanting a wife—I being a farmer, and having no competent young woman with my interest at heart,’ went on Harry, his blue eyes twinkling, ‘to look after the butter and cheese, the feeding of the calves, the fattening of the geese, and the multiplying of the eggs and chickens, when I find I have quite enough to do, even

with Horry for my *aide*, to manage the labourer fellows in the fields and offices, and attend the markets—if you think I don't want a wife dreadfully, it is little you know of a yeoman's difficulties. As to consenting to try for an imitation farmer's wife, why you yourself politely hinted a minute ago that there was quite enough of the mock article at Copley Grange Farm already. No, thanks. I knew exactly what the position was when Aggie spent her holiday weeks at the Farm. The babe could not have told barley from oats if they had not been in the ear; and though that did not matter much, I am morally certain she was shaky on the important question of hens' nests—whether they were not to be found in bushes, if not on tree-tops. She spoilt all the dairy produce while she was here, by insisting on dabbling in it in her ignorance, my housekeeper complained. And the child was always begging to be amused, and seeking to

go and look at the horses and cattle when it was not convenient and I ought to have been hard at work elsewhere. She would not be put off with Horry's escort ; fact was, all my energies were employed in keeping the peace between the little girl and the cantankerous old man.'

Oliver was forced to laugh, but he laughed harshly. 'Stanhope, you're a donkey if you propose to marry my sister, that she may act as your head dairymaid and principal hen-wife. That is not her *forte*,' he said.

'Do you mean to insult me?' cried Harry, firing up in spite of his easy temper. 'By Jove, you may thank Fan if I bear it. I may have cracked an ill-timed joke, but it was you who tempted me to it. Fan believes me ; she understands how I love and honour her, and choose her before all other women ; and if she does me the honour to choose me in return, I suppose she is at liberty to make

her choice? Not even a Turk of a brother, since he is not her father, and she is of age, can prevent it,' ended Harry defiantly.

'This preposterous stuff must be put an end to. I will see my sister.' Oliver flung out of his room, and encountered Fan hovering over the breakfast-table, and looking fresh yet pale, like a solitary daisy blooming in a sheltered corner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FAN'S TRIUMPH.

‘COME along, Fan, to the front door, where the fellow has retreated. Here is a fluke, but the sooner you deal with it the better; you must spoil your breakfast, and have done with it. Harry Stanhope is as mad as a hatter this morning, and nothing will bring him back to soberness of mind save your giving him his *congé* in so many words. This is speaking plainly. Are you not amazed? I imagine you never apprehended such a desperately moonshiny business from Stanhope, who’s in a general way commonplace and matter-of-fact in his greenness. But come along, it will not do to keep the young idiot waiting.’

‘But what if there are two of us as mad as hatters?’ said Fan, blushing and brightening up like the white daisy when the red tips of its petals catch the beams of the sun.

‘Fan, you cannot be so crazy, so weak to imbecility!’ cried Oliver, incredulously; and then, as his unbelief began to be shaken by her looks, still more than her words, he protested passionately on her account: ‘A boy like Harry Stanhope! the merest boy in his fancies, as you have had abundant proof; hardly responsible for his actions, not fit to know his own mind, as sure to change as the wind.’

‘He is not so much younger a boy than you are, Oliver,’ said Fan, with restrained spirit. ‘He is a little older than I am in years, and I don’t feel so very youthful in spirit. I should be inclined to think I was capable of knowing my own mind, and being held re-

sponsible for my actions. But, no doubt, women are a great deal older, in proportion, than men. You are all boys to us,' said Fan, with demure motherliness. 'I have even ventured to call a sage like you a boy.'

'Fan,' said Oliver, 'don't drive me beside myself. This is no occasion for teasing, and I could not have believed you the woman to begin to tease in such circumstances. I have been accustomed to think you sensible, capable of self-respect, rather proud than meek. Have you considered what sort of beggar Stanhope is, apart from his birth and breeding, and the grace which they have given him. He is feather-headed and an empty canister—if ever there were one. He has never thought of anything save his own pleasure since he was born. He is incapable of self-restraint, even if he knew the thing by name. He is the incarnation of selfishness—genial and jolly now, I grant you, but which will without fail grow

coarser and harder with years. At forty Harry Stanhope's stupidity and self-indulgence will be palpable to the shallowest intellect, and so may his grossness—even his brutality—if his good angel do not interfere.'

'His good angel will interfere. How dare you accuse and prophecy evil of a better man than yourself—if humility and kindness are better than arrogance and harshness, as the Bible teaches?'

Fan stood at bay for her lover. 'Harry is not a student or a scholar, any more than I am by nature,' she said more quietly; 'but that does not make him and me less of a man and a woman than if we were a fantastic theorist and an abstracted visionary. If he thinks of his pleasure, why not? when his pleasure has always been manly and honest—and is not that to his credit, left to himself, to all intents and purposes, as he has been? And it is not true that he cares only for himself; he has

been a good and true brother, as he will be good and true in all the relations of life.'

Oliver groaned. 'Do you know what the farmers, with whom he classes himself, say of his conceited, childish enterprise? They lighten their own troubles by guffawing over his muddles and messes. They say, "The plough would need to turn up gold for Mr. Stanhope to reap a harvest, even if times were as good as they are bad for agriculture." They calculate confidently he will have succeeded in making such a mull of the business into which he has rushed, without a particle of knowledge or experience, that he will be sold out and polished off in three or four years at the farthest.'

'The more need of the nearest and dearest of his friends to stand by him,' said Fan, with steadfast eyes.

'His best friend will not be able to stand by him and defend him from the ruinous con-

sequences of the new habits he is grafting on the old,' maintained Oliver doggedly. 'Harry Stanhope was known at Oxford as one of the most careless and reckless of the undergraduates who were his contemporaries. He was so unboundedly social that he was never missing where company of any kind congregated. If he could not get good, he could put up with bad. He was a regular frequenter of village alehouses, as well as a conspicuous figure at every "wine" within his reach. Now—country-town markets and the farmers' circles in commercial inns are his great resorts. To a man of Harry Stanhope's accommodating temperament, every company in which swallowing strong drink is inseparably associated with friendly intercourse, must prove playing with fire. God forbid that I should say the lad is cursed by a fatal taint, but it will be next to a miracle in his case if the demon is disappointed in getting possession of his victim.'

‘ Oliver,’ said Fan, with bated breath in her anger, as she stood on the hearthrug, confronting him, ‘ who is it that did not care though he were mixed up with the low larks of the shop lads of Friarton, so that even respectable people could grow common liars and ‘ slanderers, taking it upon them to say that he was sentenced to carry about in his person, to his dying day, the mark of his degrading excesses ? ’

‘ Let them say it,’ retorted Oliver, raising his head, quickly, and without flinching ; ‘ that is another affair. The end may justify the means, if some small love of fair play and poor humanity keep a man true to his colours, through evil as well as good report ; if his conscience clear him, and they who ought to know, are satisfied he is falsely accused. But only charity on the brain can regard Harry Stanhope as bitten by a rabid regard for his kind, or for anybody save himself, and perhaps his second self Horry.’

He tried her on other grounds. ‘How can you take it upon you to be a farmer’s wife, Fan? How can you pretend to acquirements which you never possessed, which you have never so much as tried to gain? You have always had the strongest prejudice against the position of a tradesman, and I take it you cannot put a yeoman on a much higher level. Your ambition, which you did not conceal, was to lead the life of a conventional lady.’

‘I was silly,’ said Fan, composedly. ‘I did not know what a gentleman could do, and yet retain his gentle bearing unimpaired. I never met a true gentleman—forgive me, Oliver—till I saw Harry Stanhope. I will learn all farmhouse work that a farmer’s wife can do, for the sake of my farmer, to help him to conquer fortune, more quickly than I learned lessons at school to fit me to be your companion. I am not afraid to say that I will be a good farmer’s wife—behind none in the

country.' Fan pledged herself proudly, and Oliver knew the pledge would be redeemed, though Fan died for it.

'Are you willing to enter a family, every member of which will look down on you, if one of them own you at all, which I very much doubt? Can you not open your wilfully closed eyes enough to see that Horace Stanhope has not come here of late with his brother?'

'Oliver!' said Fan with flashing eyes, 'you are seeking to pique me by an objection which you must know does not exist in connection with Harry. He has no people with claims on him. He has no friends who would consider his welfare before any good to themselves, save me and his brother—who has not gone against him, and surely the more reason we should not forsake him. Did not Harry break off from his uncles and aunts when he became a farmer? They allowed him to follow his own course, and they must accept the con-

sequences. "If they cut it up rough," as he says, "they have themselves to blame for it," when they consented to what was likely to happen, if he and Horry became yeomen. Poor Horry, he would be as jealous as a woman of any other woman's coming between him and Harry!' said Fan, with a little laugh and blush; 'but I will help him to get over it for Harry's sake: he is waiving his objections already. The worst of it is, I am not just such a girl as Agneta, with whom the poor dear fellow was always sparring, so that Harry had to come in with his sweet temper, and reconcile the two. But do you imagine that I find fault with Horace Stanhope because he would not count any woman beneath the rank of a duke's daughter, who was not beautiful as the day, and an angel of virtue, deserving of Harry? There would have been the old search over again, if the devoted soul had been consulted:

Where is the maiden of mortal strain
May match with the Baron of Triermain?

It is little you know of things, Oliver, though you are a philosopher, if you think that would have made me angry with Horry, who will soon forgive me, because of the sympathy between us. Besides Horry, there is only Agneta who is really interested,' said Fan, after an instant's pause, 'and she is my friend.'

'It remains to be seen how far the friendship will stand this test!' said Oliver with gloomy scepticism. He was so exasperated as to add a taunt, for which he was sorry the moment after he had uttered it. 'Why don't you admit frankly that you are besotted enough to believe the whole race of Vere de Vere will open their arms to receive you into their castles? That must be the real inducement to form such an insane connection—not the cheap merits of a lad like Harry Stanhope.'

'If you think so badly of me, Oliver, even though I may have given you some cause by being foolish and worldly-minded, I cannot

help it!’ said Fan, deeply wounded and offended.

There was no more to be said. Harry Stanhope must not be kept kicking his heels in the mill-house court a moment longer. As Harry had calmly stated at an early stage of the contest, Oliver could not prevent his sister from making her own choice of a husband : she was of age, she was mistress of herself in every way, including the disposal of her little fortune. With respect to that, Oliver had been more just to Harry Stanhope than her brother had shown himself to Fan. Oliver had not attributed mercenary motives to the lad, as the person who ought to have known her best had fastened upon Fan the all-powerful promptings of a vain and small ambition. Oliver was quite aware that men of the class to which Harry belonged are often as good arithmeticians as the huxterers whom the gentlemen despise. The sons of the most

ancient and noble families, having the bluest blood in their veins, will look out for 'tin' with their wives, even though the suitors have to descend into mercantile walks and put up with plebeian antecedents, in order to secure the indispensable metal, as unblushingly as the northern farmer sought 'prupitty' with his daughter-in-law. Perhaps the young patricians may plead the obligation of necessity in the cases of all save the heads of their houses. The eldest son has his future secured; but if he has unfortunate younger brothers, it may reasonably be said—in spite of the gentlemanly professions provided for them, which, when it comes to that, for the most part imply the spending rather than the earning of money—they cannot dig, and to beg they are ashamed. But Harry was not of this stamp, though he may have used their slang in conversation. His mortal enemy could not accuse him of being calculating. His defects, however flagrant, were free from mercenary meanness.

Oliver looked upon himself as compelled to yield a formal outward assent, in contradiction to the inward protest, to Fan's right in the selection of a mate.

Therefore, there was no open rupture in the little family. Harry Stanhope, after his momentary spurt of anger, only laughed at his future brother-in-law's manner of receiving his first overtures, and at Oliver's way of conducting himself in the later arrangements. In Harry's eyes, Oliver's behaviour was in keeping with the grumpiness which the young aristocrat had always imputed to his democratic senior. It was part of the *rôle* of a radical, which Harry conceived Oliver to be.

Harry could afford to treat the matter lightly; neither did Oliver, after the first pang of painful surprise and bitter disappointment, wish to quarrel outright with Fan's bridegroom. Thus the two preserved a truce; though they fell off, rather than drew closer, in whatever

friendship had hitherto existed between them, in the prospect of their nearer alliance. Oliver turned over Harry entirely to Fan, as, no doubt, he might have done in any circumstances, unless the young fellow had been Oliver's chosen chum and mate as well as Fan's.

Fan smothered the keen regret called forth by her brother's unshaken, inveterate hostility to the marriage he could not hinder, and to the gulf deepening between them, as best she might.

In every other light Fan's lot was a triumph. For she had never been mercenary, any more than Harry had been. She had been aspiring in a sense, with a craving for superficial refinement, as somehow representing to Fan the far deeper refinement and nobility of nature, of which the surface polish—however becoming in itself and pleasant to encounter—is by no means the inseparable accompaniment; and for pure love of Harry

Stanhope, Fan was prepared to crush her individual tastes. She was willing to be a poor man's partner, to drudge as a practical housekeeper, to toil after another fashion as the notable wife of a lucky farmer, to forget her girlish dreams of bountiful ease, culture, and elegance.

Fan had her bright, brief day both in a higher and a lower sense. She enjoyed that short interval in which a woman is beside herself and counts herself—not merely the happiest of women, but the only happy woman in the world deserving of the name, because she has not only won a heart in exchange for her own, but because this heart, subdued by her power, is the heart of hearts to her, compared to which all other hearts are little better than dross.

Fan had also the lower, but what was to her the genuine and natural gratification of being conscious that those of her neighbours on

whose opinions she had been wont to set store, having arrived at the unanimous conclusion that Fan Constable had done well for herself, became suddenly moved to change their chorus of condemnation to a chant of glorification. The Fremantles and Wrights proved themselves no more mercenary than Fan and Harry. The magnates of Friarton had not worshipped in fear and trembling a big burly image of mammon, but a shadowy fetish of gentility. Fan Constable, whom the ladies and the professional set now acknowledged to be the most charming ladylike girl in the neighbourhood, would not be a farmer's wife to them. She would—since the inferior distinction merged and was lost in the superior—be the wife of Harry Stanhope, grandson of Lord St. Ives, nephew by marriage of Lord Mount Mallow. Accordingly these authorities renewed their withdrawn attentions with an eager lavishness, in striking contrast to the donors' former cautious,

stinted dole of recognition. They betrayed the knowledge, which Fan shared, that it would soon be her turn to pay them attention.

When Fan's honours were fully fledged, she might have a share of the liberty which was vouchsafed to her husband, granted to her. She might skim the milk in her dairy, and gather the eggs in her poultry-yard, even carry them in the skirt of her gown, as Agneta Stanhope had carried them, without challenge. And if Harry had been the son and not the grandson of a viscount, and thus only one degree instead of two removed from a peerage, or if his father's father had been a marquis or a duke, who knows but that Fan might have been allowed to go on to milk her cows and feed her calves—not in frolic?

Mrs. Hilliard was impressed by Fan's promotion. 'That girl Fan Constable has proved her mettle with perfectly lawful weapons, for she is too true a little Philistine to stoop to

employ any other.' Mrs. Hilliard ate her leek before her cousin, and it was no small comfort to Louisa Hilliard, in her state of mind at the moment, that Catherine was next to nobody when eating a leek was in question.

'Both of these Constables have used me ill, have got the better of me—of us all.' Mrs. Hilliard spoke ruefully for her. 'Fan, with her negative drawing-room and positive attitude, has been and gone and done it under our very noses.'

'Done what?' enquired the only half-awake Catherine.

'Distanced her competitors—the Houghtons, the head-master's nieces; how do I know how many? all who had entered for the prize. She has overcome and trampled upon her foes, and carried off the chance which might have been yours, my dear, only you sat still and missed it.'

'Was Harry Stanhope my chance in life?'

enquired Catherine, opening her weary eyes. 'Have I missed my all in losing him? Well, I did not flatter myself there was any great thing to look forward to in my career, if a woman can be said to have a career, but I have been guilty of the presumption of dreading (and do you know the dread gave a kind of trembling interest to life?) that there might be greater losses to encounter than that of Harry Stanhope's handkerchief—not that there was ever the remotest prospect of its being thrown at me.'

'Catherine!' and with the exclamation Mrs. Hilliard looked at her cousin gravely for once, though her lively mind soon reverted to its ordinary track. 'You frighten me, and that is treating me still worse than the Constables have treated me. My cousins, whom I owned, have eluded my grasp, and got beyond me, the one floored and the other crowned—alike disqualified for serving as food for my entertain-

ment. But I never asked you to entertain me'—Mrs. Hilliard assailed Catherine, growing serious again—'only to entertain yourself. And if you cannot do it in any other way, I am tempted to wish I could approve of a Protestant sisterhood for you. It might afford you a refuge when the world makes you so tired that you seem in danger of falling down under the load. I can lift it off myself with my little finger, but I cannot with my two hands, and all my might, remove the burden from you, poor child.' The clear ring of Mrs. Hilliard's voice had softened, and there was moisture in the eyes usually so dry in their sparkle.

'Never mind me, Louisa,' said Catherine, roused to faint surprise and reluctance to cause trouble. 'I am only too well off, you know. I am sickening—that is, if I am sickening—"of a vague disease;" I ought to have to work for my bread—supposing bread is worth working for—yet starvation must really be an unpleasant

process to stimulate so many people to frantic exertions in order to avert the catastrophe. Protestant sisterhoods would not suit me, nor would Catholic nunneries, though I think, of the two, I should prefer the last, as possessing a respectable antiquity and consistency. But to enter either would be a sham in me, since I really believe that the Son of God could help me staying with you, as well as with any lady superior or abbess—that we are as near heaven living in the world in which He lived, as when we try in vain to get out of it. It would only be a change of yoke, and my shoulders seem to be slimmer than other women's,' remarked Catherine with a forlorn smile. 'Besides, no sisterhood would receive a menagerie with me—and whatever else I might be brought to resign, I do not see how I could get on without a large small family of beasts and birds.'

'Thank you for the implied compliment,' said Mrs. Hilliard, recovering herself with a

laugh. ‘Catherine, you administer tonics, though you won’t swallow them.’

When the time came for Mrs. Hilliard to offer the usual congratulations, her hearty admiration of Fan’s prowess so influenced the lady, that she presented the tribute cordially, and was entitled to complain that Fan had no reason to receive it superciliously.

But Catherine was not merely languid in her felicitations, she stopped short in them, and substituted an uncalled-for piece of condolence : ‘How dull it will be for you with Mr. Stanhope and his brother at Copley Grange Farm, when you have been accustomed to solitude with your own brother!’ looking at amazed, indignant Fan, with great uncomprehending, commiserating eyes. ‘I hope you will not die of *ennui* after the first week. No, I don’t forget that Mr. Stanhope is very fond of visiting, and you will have to visit a great deal with him, but won’t that also be dreadfully fatiguing?’

The Polleys and Dadds were not behind the others with their ovation ; but, to Fan's immense relief, she found she had established by this last step such a distance between herself and her early associates that they no longer even attempted to bridge it over. Fan Constable had succeeded in passing out of their sphere. They wished her joy as it were through Harry Stanhope, and they were as respectful in the expression of their good wishes, as if the rank which she was so soon to borrow from him already belonged to her.

Old Dadd refrained from a single joke, and was almost solemn in alluding to the subject.

Mrs. Polley only bristled up to Oliver, and represented to him that he would no longer be content to sit down in her back parlour, since he might be making the round of all the castles in the kingdom in company with his brother-in-law.

Jack Dadd actually called Fan 'Miss Constable,' unless in the strictest privacy, among

his most intimate cronies, or as a means of teasing the Polley girls.

'Mily Polley did not propose to call on Mrs. Stanhope. 'She is a cut above us, now, and no mistake, when she'll be going among his grand relations—generals and admirals, and Lady This and Lady That, every time he takes her up to town. I dare say the fine people will snub her, but Fan Constable won't mind that, since they can't close their doors against her, and she married to their nephew and first cousin; and she'll give as good as she'll take, I'll say that for her. She's never behind. But I tell you what, 'Liza, we'll put our pride in our pockets—what's the good of letting it stand in our way? and come round mother, and go to church instead of to chapel, the first Sunday after Mrs. Stanhope has returned from her wedding jaunt. We'll try if we can't get a wrinkle—as Jack Dadd says—out of her new bonnet. Only Fan Constable

does not know how to dress herself. Yet she has caught a duck of a real gentleman, like Mr. Stanhope is, with her dowdy clothes, and her plain sewing, and her whity-brown face,' cried 'Mily, in exasperation at the contradiction.

'She had been his fate,' said 'Liza, mysteriously.

'You shut up, 'Liza, and don't talk as if you believed in fortune-telling—not that I should mind a bit getting my fortune told by a right old woman, in a red cloak, with a pack of cards. It would be lovely. And, oh my! wouldn't mother be down on me, if she found me out!' cried 'Mily, in high glee at the bare idea of the servant girl's escapade.

'It is an instinct of self-preservation on the fellow's part, and on Fan's it is the old infatuation and the recent reaction working their worst together. There is no help for it,' said Oliver to himself, slowly and sadly.

Beyond the area of Copley Grange Farm every voice of every Stanhope was dumb on the announcement of Harry's marriage. The members of the Stanhope family certainly agreed with Oliver, that it was useless to interpose from any hope of dealing effectually with the consummation of Harry's descent in life, to which his friends had formerly been provoked into giving a reluctant consent.

At last Agneta wrote to Fan, very prettily, within certain limits. Agneta was glad that her dear old Harry should be happy. She thanked Fan for making his happiness. She trusted that she and Fan would always remain friends. But there was not a word of Agneta's coming down to Copley Grange Farm to grace the marriage ; not a hint of any future visit ; not a syllable of meeting Fan again in the whole course of their respective lives.

Fan read the letter without any remark. As she read she grew still more colourless in

her olive paleness, which 'Mily Polley called 'whity-brownness,' but there was also a more steadfast set of her well-cut mouth, a more indomitable expression in her brown eyes.

She did not give Oliver the letter to read ; indeed, the brother and sister were no longer on such terms as to volunteer an exchange of confidences. She only surrendered the dainty epistle to Harry at his special request.

Harry reddened and bit his lip as he took in, at a couple of glances, the familiar writing on the page and a half of note-paper. 'Dash it ! I did not think Aggie could have been such a cold-hearted chit,' he muttered ; 'I did think she was more of a lady than to be a stuck-up snob.'

'Never mind,' said Fan, with determined magnanimity ; 'I dare say it is hard for her to have you stoop for a wife.'

'Stoop !' protested Harry, who was loyal in his attachments, if he was anything ; 'it is my

first regular attempt at climbing since I got out of the garret window at one of our tutors. I nearly broke my neck then, but I have fallen on my feet this time. I have done the best stroke of business I can ever hope to accomplish, though I should live to head all the markets round with my heifers and south downs, and win the prizes from the Prince and all the agricultural nobs in the country at the show at Islington. Ask your brother who has the best of the bargain in our blessed contract. It is all Aunt Julia's doing. In her aping of liberality and angling for popularity she is at heart the most time-serving and intolerant old woman under the sun.'

'Then it will be a victory indeed, if we can force her, and everybody else with her, to come round to our side at last,' said Fan, fired by her dauntless courage.

There was not more than a grain of truth in Oliver's cruel accusation of what had led

Fan to listen to Harry Stanhope. But that fructifying grain, together with the passion of her love for Harry, helped the unimaginative, rational young woman to rear an airy structure—representing her ultimate relations with the Stanhopes and the great world. There was Harry encouraged, aided, ‘kept up to the scratch,’ by his wife’s proud and loving support in all manly energy and perseverance in his profession. There were his name, fame, and fortune established, as the most enterprising and successful gentleman-farmer in the country. (Fan paid no heed to the signs of the times or to impending agricultural distress, in her dream). There was the reappearance of the Hartleys on every rumour of a fresh election, with John Hartley, thankful to accept Harry Stanhope as an ally on equal terms, with Lady Cicely, who had once demurred at the possibility of Fan’s accompanying her brother to dine at Copley Grange, pleased to drive over with her hus-

band, and dine herself at Copley Grange Farm. Of course, that must be after the old farmhouse was added to and improved, so as not to be altogether ill-matched with the manor-house. If the *entrée* to the manor-house were secured during the Hartleys' temporary occupation of Copley Grange, it would almost certainly remain free to the Stanhopes when Mr. Amyott resumed his permanent reign. The example of the Stanhopes' landlord would be followed by other squires whose houses were within visiting distance of the Farm.

Fan, in her chrysalis state, had often looked from the mill side of the Brook across to the park and great house, with its dignified blot of an Italian façade. She had fancied how bountiful and gracious life must be there, contrasted with life in the back shops and parlours of the Polleys and Dadds. But she had felt then that if by virtue of Oliver's genius and scholarship

she ever rose to cross the threshold of such an Eden of refinement and culture, its roses would be full of thorns for her, simply because she would not be, like the daughters of that privileged region, to the manner born. Innately she was a lady, but outwardly she would blunder and flounder in the labyrinths of precedence and etiquette, or amidst the appalling topics of sport, horses and wines, from all acquaintance with which her sex, alas! did not exempt a woman of the higher orders. Fan would cause flippant waiting-maids to titter, and staid butlers to frown, at her mistakes..

Now all this was changed. When Fan should procure the 'Open, Sesame!' to the charmed houses by so strange a process as that of becoming a yeoman's wife and doing a yeoman's wife's work, all her troubles would be at an end. Harry had been born to the purple, and he would always be at hand to

give involuntarily the cue which she would take as quickly as ever King Cophetua's beggar-maid borrowed lustre from her royal husband, and developed without loss of time into a right queenly lady. Fan would not wear sparkling diamonds or sumptuous velvet, indeed, but she had never cared for jewels or fine clothes or luxury. What she had cared for she would attain, the simple elegance of bearing and behaviour of a gentlewoman, by art as well as by nature.

In the meantime, while these chickens were unhatched, Friarton took it as a matter of course that Harry Stanhope's kindred should begin by looking coldly on the projected alliance between Copley Grange Farm and Friarton Mill, and did not think of deposing Fan from her pedestal as a bride because she was subjected to this ordeal.

One relative came forward before the knot was tied, and accepted Fan—not simply as an

inevitable misfortune, but as a member of the illustrious family of Stanhope. The next time Harry came to the Mill, after Agneta's note had been received there, he was not only attended by his second shadow ; a voice, which had been hitherto dumb, spoke.

Horace managed, with his surly awkwardness—which was something quite different from Oliver Constable's awkwardness—and his bilious ungraciousness, even in conferring a compliment, which made it seem as if a good-natured impulse went entirely against the grain with him, to propose himself as Harry's groomsman. 'If you don't mind, if no other body will serve Harry's purpose, and help to turn him off,' he said to Fan in the voice, the tone of which was out of tune and grating, unless sometimes when he addressed his brother.

Fan had never smiled so sweetly on Harry in the whole course of his wooing, as she now smiled on the grudging, unjoyous groomsman,

who, sure enough, was to be Harry's servant, not hers. 'Oh! I am glad and grateful that Harry's oldest and best friend is to stand by him on his marriage day,' she said audibly to the dull ears. 'I know you are not thinking of me, and I do not wish you to think of me—I only say this to express, though you may not care to hear, what an obligation and honour you are conferring on me by acting as Harry's brother still. But it is so, Mr. Horace' (she had not begun to call him by his Christian name, just as he had never called her anything save 'Miss Constable.' She was in some apprehension that 'Miss Constable' would not even pass into 'Mrs. Stanhope' with Horace). 'I will never forget your kindness to Harry,' she finished.

He looked at her for a moment with an impulse of furious displeasure added to his ordinary gruff, sardonic mood, as if he questioned her right to thank him for Harry, and

bade her be wary of taking so much upon her. Then her tender tact penetrated the thick skin of his jaundiced, warped nature. 'All right, Fan,' he said, touching her hand and dropping it again, and giving what exacting, fastidious people might have classed as a ghastly grin. But from that date Fan was happily convinced that though she was a very small person compared to Harry in his brother's eyes, Horace had forgiven her on the spot, and taken her, for all time to come, into a humble corner of the chamber of his affections, since she had shown herself capable of comprehending, in a degree, what the brothers were to each other, and would never seek to separate them. Thus Harry Stanhope's lovers and slaves became sworn allies, and not vowed adversaries.

The hard lines were for Oliver. It was all very well for Sally Pope to cackle that now Miss Fan had got her will, and she wished the young mistress well, neither was it any harm

to speed her going, for marriage was the best lot that could befall most young women, and she would 'fettle' Master Oliver—see how comfortable she would make him, in all the old homely ways, like a king with his faithful housekeeper.

Oliver had no doubt Sally would make his body comfortable, but what of the refreshment of his mind and heart now that his father was dead, when his only sister—the little Fan of other days—alienated from him already, should have left him in order to make a foolish *més-alliance* of which no good could come? Friarton Mill in its sweet domestic beauty would be robbed of its chief attraction so soon as Fan was gone.

CHAPTER XXV.

‘THE DEVIL SHALL NOT HAVE HARRY.’

THE three years allotted by his brother-farmers for Harry Stanhope to run through what small patrimony he had invested in Copley Grange Farm, and what credit he had begun upon, did their work more effectually than the months given by Oliver Constable for Harry to tire of his part as a yeoman.

Fan had held her husband back with a little hand which was like a vice for staunchness, but which had, at last, loosened its grip under overwhelming pressure.

Horace had thrown his passive dead weight in the way, to impede Harry's swift progress to ruin.

Oliver Constable had not stood aside in sulky neutrality, or hard inflexibility flavoured with vindictiveness, to witness the fulfilment of his predictions. He would have given much for them to prove false. He did all he could to prevent their realisation. He had little in common with his brother-in-law, and it was in the characters of the two men to grow always more apart instead of nearer to each other. Still Oliver, though he was not much in Harry Stanhope's company, and though Harry showed himself constantly more restive, under any influence which Oliver had ever possessed over him, tried his best in the thankless office of looking after Harry, when he was beyond his wife's scope, and of interposing to save him—not merely from the consequences of his own folly, but from falling a victim to his neighbours' weaknesses. As a result of this knight-errantry on Oliver's part, there was an entire rupture between him and Jack Dadd on Harry's account.

Harry Stanhope's incapacity for drawing distinctions—moral as well as social—his vanity and passion for popularity, had all pointed with tolerable clearness to one conclusion from the first. He had no notion of what was expedient. He was not particular in his easy-going fashion. He was bound to turn soon from his self-imposed obligations, selected very much at haphazard, and sitting with the greatest lightness upon him. He must have excitement of some kind, at any cost.

The upper, and, to be fair, the more decorous, set in Friarton, which had commenced by being delighted with their opposite in Harry Stanhope's *abandon*, matched as it was with his gentle birth and breeding, ceased to prize his company when they found it was bestowed on their social inferiors with a thousand times the lavishness and indiscriminateness which they had severely censured in Oliver Constable. And all the time Oliver had claimed a right to act as he

did, and asserted a principle in it, while he had shown a method in his madness. In the course of the last three years, he had brought his accusers to acknowledge that, though he had lost himself in the matter of his money, talents, and education, with the desirable position which they might have commanded, he was not a reprobate, and he had known when to stop long before the climax of individual degradation.

As Harry Stanhope ceased to be the idol of the gentlemen and ladies, he became also less of the pet and more of the butt of the lower grade into which he was increasingly thrown. The young farmers and tradesmen with whom he fraternised, not only at market and in cricket-matches and games of bowls, but on every occasion, public and private, still looked up to him in many things, and copied him—not always to their benefit, but a stronger tincture of contempt was getting infused into their liking.

This was especially true of Jack Dadd, who, while he continued proud of being hand-in-glove with Harry Stanhope, did not scruple to make a cat's-paw of his friend, and rather enjoyed leading him into a scrape and leaving him there. This disloyalty and shade of baseness did not spring necessarily from Jack's class or calling, and they had still less to do with his natural good temper. They belonged to long-standing class feuds and the lingering spite thus engendered. It was almost inevitably wreaked on a person who, however ready to forget social prejudices, sprang still from the privileged order.

Oliver humbled himself in the room of Harry Stanhope, and through Harry in the place of Fan, to remonstrate with Jack Dadd.

‘ You are older than Stanhope, Jack,’ Oliver reminded his quondam friend, who had bragged earlier of their friendship, ‘ and you

were not brought up in the very odour of thoughtlessness.'

'So I suppose I ain't fit to go about with your gentleman brother-in-law, unless as his keeper. "Not if I know it;" "Not for Joe,"' interrupted Jack, rudely and flippantly. 'I ain't so fond of being a fellow's keeper, as you are, Constable, though you don't seem to like to try it on Harry Stanhope. I thought you had got a lesson and rid yourself of such priggishness, long ago. It ain't a compliment to Stanhope to make out he's not fit to take care of hisself, or to choose his company and be on equal terms with them. Lord! it was a funny sort of equality last night when I cut my stick, just as he was challenging the stableman at the "Wheat Ears" to box with him, Dummy being to hold their jackets, I take it. Stanhope ain't proud; I'll say that for him, neither when he's as tight as a lord, nor when he's as sober as a judge—which don't often happen now-a-days. It comes to this, Constable, I've had enough of

your sauce of dictation. There was not so much difference between that and your sister's airs, and a fine pass they've brought her to: got her a gentleman for a husband, no doubt—and, what is more, he's worth the two of you; but he's made her work for him so as keeping a shop would have been a joke by comparison, and he'll kick the causeway all the same.'

After that conversation there was an end to friendly intercourse between Oliver and Jack, and to any fond hope which the former had once been so conceited as to entertain, of swaying his brother-tradesman to higher aims.

Harry Stanhope's deterioration in every respect included his inveterate idleness in all pursuits which did not take the form of sport or frolic, while ploughing, sowing, cattle-feeding, even haymaking and reaping, when they ceased to be novelties, ceased also to be sport or frolic, lost every element of interest and amusement, and became positively repugnant

to the man who remained always a boy. He neglected his farming utterly, or made wild havoc with it in his fitful, reckless operations, forced sales, and consequent desperate losses.

With all this wanton waste Fan had nothing to do. She had accomplished wonders in the *rôle* she had undertaken. Her dairy produce and poultry were from the first among the best in the neighbourhood. She competed successfully with those farmers' wives who were either nothing save dairymaids and henwives, or who employed experienced servants to do their mistresses' work by proxy. Any prizes which agricultural societies awarded to the tenants of Copley Grange Farm were for its mistress's butter and cheese, goslings and turkey poults.

And all the time Fan was not a dairymaid alone, she was a gentleman's wife deserving of the name. In order to unite the contrasting attributes, she rose up early and lay down late, and ate the bread of carefulness. She changed

her dress as often as any fine lady who has nothing to do, no occupation or pleasure in life save dressing herself by the help of a maid. Fan was rewarded when Harry noticed the freshness of her calicot morning gown, the daintiness of her afternoon piqué, the good taste of her evening grenadine.

Neither Harry nor Horace had an idea of gardening beyond sticking a spade into the ground once in the course of the spring and leaving it there after a quarter of an hour, or gathering an occasional handful of strawberries, while the cook demanded a regular supply of vegetables, and the masters missed seasonable fruit when it was not forthcoming, appearing to expect cherries, peaches, and pears to drop from the skies like manna. Fan read garden chronicles alternately with dairy manuals, and spent many a fatiguing hour of her early married life striving to direct the labours of an improvised

gardener drawn from the ranks of the field workers. It was as much out of the question for Harry to keep a skilled gardener as it was for Fan to set up a qualified housekeeper and an experienced dairymaid, though Harry would have attempted it without a doubt if he had been suffered. But Fan stinted herself of all other worthy assistants, because a good cook and a trained table-boy who could cater for the two young men and wait upon them as they had been used to be waited upon, became absolutely necessary to the Stanhopes, as soon as their establishment at Copley Grange Farm acquired a settled character, and ceased to partake of the nature of living for a time *al fresco*, or *in villeggiatura*.

When Fan became painfully conscious that she had not only her own arduous double and treble duties to attend to, she must also supply deficiencies on Harry's part, she rose to the occasion gallantly. She added agricultural

journals, treatises on husbandry, essays on farm stock, to her other diligent studies. She crammed herself; she sought to coach Harry. She tired herself to death and exposed herself to innumerable catarrhs and coughs wandering over the fields in all kinds of weather, to win him, by her close sympathetic companionship, to go among his men, or else to show them, in his interest, that there was the eye of a mistress, if not a master, on their work. She drove with Harry and Horace to the markets, and if it had not been to spare Harry's dignity as a yeoman and his credit as a man—since poor Fan had a double object and a double terror in accompanying her husband to the towns—she would willingly have stood with him in the streets and the corn exchanges and sat with him at the inn tables. And if Fan could have been ten women instead of one, she might have saved Harry Stanhope from worldly destruction, as Mrs. Polley had rescued her husband and

children. The two women did not resemble each other much in other respects, and there was little love lost between them. But they shared at least the helpfulness, command of resources, and capacity for brave effort and endurance, of the women of the trading classes—the women who have not been spoilt, and have not lost the instincts of energy and enterprise, and with it the most distant resemblance to the virtuous woman in Proverbs. This was part of Fan's inheritance as a tradesman's daughter, which she had neither guessed nor valued as it deserved.

It is a fact established by experience that many women, both widows and spinsters, have made, when the opportunities offered themselves, good and successful farmers. Fan was a clever woman apart from book-learning; she was a woman of strong resolution, and she was stimulated and braced by every motive which she held dear. If a single mortal woman could

have redeemed Harry Stanhope's fortunes, she would have redeemed them.

But the one woman must certainly have been ten, and Fan could not multiply her identity or render herself ubiquitous. She was tremendously overweighted—not only by the whole burden and anxiety of the farm's being cast upon her, who ought to have been treated as the weaker vessel, but by the unnerving, despairing suspicion—deepening every day into hopeless conviction, that an impending wreck of other than worldly goods was to be faced and wrestled with. Harry was—in what became always more imminent and hideous danger—of being as speedily and utterly swamped in tastes, opinions, habits—all that constitute moral character, as in income and capital. In the dread and horror of that final downfall, all other falls began to look light.

Fan ceased to pay the smallest heed to the fact that still there came no recognition of her

entrance into the Stanhope family save from pretty, temporising, meaningless letters written by Agneta. The other members coolly ignored the intruder. Mrs. Harry Stanhope had no concern to spare for the consciousness that the little household at Copley Grange Farm were not keeping their first footing, which had seemed to be their birthright, among the upper ten of Friarton.

She did not even mind that the Polleys and Dadds grew loud in amazed pity — in which, at the same time, she believed they revelled, over her altered circumstances. Mrs. Harry Stanhope was not only reduced to sending butter, cheese and eggs into the town for sale, she came herself to the Polleys' shop and the cheese shop, to square the accounts which no one else at the farm could make out. Everybody knew Harry Stanhope had turned out a gentle beggar and purely ornamental. He could not afford to keep a bailiff to give the

orders for which he was so little prepared that his men continually laughed in their sleeves at the instructions they received. The mistress of Copley Grange Farm commanded no more help than she could get from a girl under twenty in addition to the dairyman to manage the dairy and poultry yard, on which it was evident the principal dependence of the farmer must rest. And did not the old Fan Constable look worn and pulled down, though she might be proud and 'game' to the last, as Mrs. Harry Stanhope? The truth was that when Fan was from home or in society without Harry, her eyes had already acquired the fixed, abstracted look of eyes which are looking beyond their present surroundings, and seeing in the distance things invisible to her companions. Her ears were constantly on the alert, strained to catch sounds inaudible to the rest of the party. While she was taking her share in the conversation or the business going on about her, there was a

perpetual undercurrent of thought and care in her mind which had no reference to the topics discussed. She had great self-command, so that she could preserve a double consciousness, but she was never at ease, never without trouble ; and the unresting worry beneath the calm and smiling surface, showed itself in a haggard, aging look which was rapidly robbing Fan of all traces of her youth.

One evening in spring, when the thrushes and blackbirds were anticipating the nightingales and tuning their 'prentice notes in the hedges—which had gained the purplish-red bloom, the herald of a flush of green—over the primroses looking pale and cold in the raw wind of the March twilight, after the golden shields of the celandines, which had kept their neighbours company with quite an exuberance of jollity in the morning sunshine, had collapsed, as early as the afternoon, into small tightly wrapped-up balls, encased in dim green envelopes, Oliver

was startled by Fan's walking like a ghost unexpected, unannounced, and all alone, into the mill-house parlour.

It was too early in the season for evening strolls, and lately Fan had never been seen abroad without her husband. The same could not be said of Harry, who was often enough from home without his wife, and not quite so frequently, but still with tolerably constant recurrence during the winter, without his brother, whom he had learnt at last to shake off imperiously. There had come to be an unnatural divorce between light and shade, and day and night, neither faring well in the separation. For Harry, all by himself, drove his chariot of the sun, like another Phaëton, madly, and if he did not set the world on fire, his own eyes grew scorched and bloodshot, his lips parched, his hands palsied; the whole goodly springs of his manliness and kindliness were dried up and polluted with ashes, because of

the burden of consuming fire he had laid hold of and would thenceforth try in vain to guide and control.

As for Horace, he would slink away like a dog summarily dismissed by his master, withdraw into his corner to sit moodily there, and only start up on the distant sound of Harry's clogged instead of winged footsteps. Oliver had seen Horace and Fan exchange furtive, miserable glances when Horace returned thus alone, and drew back into the greatest gloom which the little drawing-room afforded him. Then the pair would sedulously pretend to read and work while in reality their ears were on the stretch, and their hearts on the rack, till far on into the night. These two knew and trusted each other thoroughly by this time, though Oliver was certain the looks never passed into words. Wife and brother remained too loyal in their allegiance.

As Oliver rose hastily to bid Fan welcome,

he saw more plainly than he had yet seen it, and with a sharp pang at the sight, the change in her looks. A small woman to begin with, she was now little more than skin and bone. Her brown eyes appeared a sombre black, set in great shadowy hollows in her white face. The straight firm line of her lips was drooping and quivering. She put her thin hand in Oliver's and held up her face to be kissed, and spoke without any preamble. 'I am beaten, Oliver. They say an Englishman never knows when he is beaten, but that is a man, not a woman. Yet did you ever think I would give in with life? and I have given in. I have come to you, not to save me—you tried that once and failed. What did it matter if I might have saved another? only I have not—there's the rub. I don't mind myself, and you need not mind me. But you must do something. I tell you, Oliver, you must move heaven and earth to save Harry.' Her voice rose into a little weak cry.

She was like a creature who had lost all command over herself.

But it was not so much this reversal of natural law in a woman—by organisation and courage, self-sufficing, self-restrained, rational and resolute—which smote Oliver Constable with dismay and compunction, as if he had been the sinner whose sin was at the bottom of this spectacle, the most pitiable he had ever beheld. It was some comprehension of what Fan must have suffered, of what it had cost this woman—ardent and steadfast as women even more than men can prove themselves—to own herself beaten, to grovel as it were at his knees, and fling herself for help on him of all men, who, though he had been a brother in more than name, had interposed with all his might, without effect, as both of them were well aware, to turn her from the step which had brought her to this pass.

He remembered having, more than once in

their lives, angrily accused her of being incapable of changing her mind ; and—knowing as he had seemed to know her high spirit, unquenchable energy, and unswerving determination—he had been tempted to believe, against right reason, that however mistaken and misplaced her aspirations, or foolish and baseless her dreams, Fan could not be baffled, and would not be vanquished.

The end of all was, that she was more thoroughly subdued, presenting a more deplorable object of contemplation, than if she had been a far feebler woman.

‘My God!’ cried Oliver in his heart—moved as he was to its depths when a believing man can but appeal to the Father of his spirit ; ‘ what must she not have borne to crush her whole being, lay her pride in the dust, extinguish the last spark of hope, and break her heart ? ’

The next moment Oliver was briskly

administering to Fan, as most people in his position, at their wits' end what to do for the best, would have administered it, a cold douche—first on the suppliant, whom he would fain have taken into his arms and sheltered from every farther blast of the stormy wind which had cast her down bleeding and powerless, to implore mercy for another and not herself—and next on her agonised petition.

‘Nonsense, Fan, you are over-wrought, my dear; your nerves are unstrung; you do not know what you are saying.’

But the time for pulling herself together, struggling to her feet, and staggering on with the veil drawn decently down again over her torture and her faintness, was over for Fan. ‘I do know what I am saying, Oliver,’ she insisted with ashy lips, while the hand which clutched his arm was trembling like a leaf. ‘You think a wife should not drop the slightest hint of the skeleton in her closet. I will agree

with you here. And I have not breathed a word to any other human being—not to Horry, who is his second self—only to you ; and do you suppose I could have spoken to you unless in the last extremity, which has come ?’

‘Then rest satisfied with what you have done, Fan ; say no more about it,’ Oliver conjured her, as if he would have put his hand upon her mouth to keep her from further utterance, or brought down the creeping dusk to hide their faces from each other. He got up, took several turns up and down the room, so that he might have his back to her when he promised solemnly ; ‘The devil shall not have Harry, so far as I can help it.’

That Fan should have come to her brother with such a prayer on her lips, was only less bad for him than for Fan herself.

Oliver Constable had not the most distant thought that Harry Stanhope could have grossly ill-treated his wife. Oliver would as

soon have suspected Harry of lifting up his strong right arm to strike down Horace unresisting under the pacific influence of his devotion. It is your poor half-brutal coal-heaver who ordinarily adds kicks to curses, where his wife is concerned. As a rule, though certainly not without exceptions, centuries of refining civilisation and liberal education remove Harry's whole class from committing such outrages. Harry Stanhope, with his graciousness in an entirely muddled condition, might challenge a muscular ostler to a round in the noble art of self-defence. He was known to have taken the law into his own hands and knocked down a ruffian who was belabouring a child and insulting an old woman. But he had probably hardly ever spoken a rough word to Fan, whom he had held in the greatest respect ever since he had known her, though she had become powerless to make a man of him, as he had proposed. She was not silly, or bumptious, or trying in any way so as to

provoke the wrath which had originally been a rare experience with Harry. But not the less he had slain her faith in him, by his hopeless levity and folly, which were tending unmistakably to animal indulgence and besotted excess. He had not destroyed one atom of her love—else Fan's heart too might have died within her in its cold emptiness, but, at least, it would not have been wrung with the intolerable pang of loving him to death and beyond death, yet seeing him go down, in spite of her, to the place of dragons.

There are students of humanity who positively state that a good man or woman's love must inevitably perish with the loss of esteem. If so, the best human love must be singularly unlike Divine love as it is revealed to us. And it is one thing voluntarily to give love to a creature whose repulsive moral disease is evident and undeniable, and has already penetrated and poisoned the nature through and

through—and quite another to have loved the same creature in the beauty and glory of sound mortal health, with but the seeds of fatal disease, only to be detected by the wise physician, lurking in the system, and having once loved to turn with loathing abhorrence and absolute rejection, from the sick man, when his weakness has found him out, his sore ancestral malady has laid fast hold of him, and he is fighting a desperate battle for life or death.

Not only did Fan's love cling to Harry in his social and moral decline still more closely than when she had learned to love him in the heyday of his natural gifts; even Oliver—who had early taken Harry for what he was worth, and condemned him to his destiny, now in the teeth of what he had done to Fan, felt the man's heart within him turn and soften with yearning and commiseration for the stripling who was so unequally matched, and was standing foot to foot, reeling under the

shocks inflicted by a giant adversary and ghastly foe.

Oliver needed this compensation of human tenderness revived and called forth in the heart of a benevolent man, by human weakness and peril in its sorriest guise and direst strait, to help to make up to him for the sacrifice he was called on to offer ; since the world had not gone well with Oliver Constable during these last years, and his own affairs required the unremitting attention which he saw himself compelled, and had pledged himself to Fan, to give to those of another.

Oliver had started on his mission impressed with the conviction that it behoved him especially to make his business prosper, or, if he could not do that, to prevent its becoming disastrous, in order to remove the slur thrown liberally on Jacks-of-all-trades, geniuses, and enthusiasts. He had not the slightest inclination to the modified martyrdom of commercial

losses for their own sake. He decidedly objected to wasting the money which his father had carefully gathered that Oliver's career as a gentleman and scholar might be untrammelled, even for a good object, if he could prevent it.

On the contrary, it was part of Oliver Constable's duty, as he conceived it, to vindicate the truth that the best citizenship and the best Christianity did not, as a matter of course, conduct a diligent, prudent, and self-denying tradesman straight into the Bankruptcy Court.

But Oliver was fated to share the lot of most real reformers and pioneers of the highest civilisation—the only civilisation which is not merely skin-deep, but which, penetrating to the core, pervades the whole man, and by the grace of God never leaves him, only departing when he himself departs, to dwell with him in heavenly habitations—and of the righteous Gospel which the Lord of Righteousness delivered to be worked out—not in church or

chapel wholly or even principally, but on such fields as the Rialto of Venice or the London Exchange, the shops of common tradesmen, the tables where feasts, great and small, are held, the hearths round which men and women meet to rest from the work of the day, and cheer their souls.

But Oliver had to discover for himself, in more ways than one, the pithiness of the proverb that to give a dog an 'ill name' is to hang him, that to run a-muck against popular prejudices is to suffer injury more or less severe, and wait long for any shadow of a reward.

He had no manner of doubt that the reward of disarming distrust and establishing a right to success would come in time, if the worker could but possess his soul in patience, and exercise sufficient faith, endurance, and bountiful liberality, if he could tarry and lay out, nothing doubting, fresh materials and pains.

Oliver's fortitude was not exhausted, but he was sensible he had spent some of his funds freely, and would soon be living on the verge of his income, if he did not economise every fraction and dedicate it to its proper use.

The secession of Jim Hull, with the establishment of his nephew in fine new baking premises and a fine new business in the town, had diverted a large slice of the public confidence and custom from what were now held the *old* Constable premises and business. The slice was always increasing in size, and diminishing the original *pièce de résistance*, from which it had been taken by the shrewdness which proved quite justified in the anticipation that the public would prefer apparent purity and actual adulteration, both in the produce of the mill and the bakehouse, to the uncorrupted but unbleached article.

There was the additional stimulus to the withdrawal of patronage of a strong spice of

malicious satisfaction, not enough to form a conspiracy, but existing in sufficient abundance for lending countenance and support, whether sly or bold, to a rival business conducted on good old-fashioned, rational, give-and-take principles. Oliver Constable had come among the Friarton shopkeepers uttering high-flown heresy, witnessing in his conduct against time-honoured liberties of trade, and stirring up doubts in the bosoms of the very tradesmen—not to say of their customers. So the Dadd and Polley part of the community had no objection that Oliver should bear in his own person the brunt of his Quixotic ideas. Perhaps that would teach him to pay greater respect to their superior age and experience.

In short, Oliver's business profits were diminishing so steadily as to threaten to make his mill and bakehouse eat their own heads, if he did not diminish in proportion the staffs of millers and bakers—a step which he objected

to take so long as he could afford to hold out, since it would not only be tantamount to an admission that he was outmatched, he argued with himself, it would be hard upon the men who had submitted to his rules and consented to work on his terms—not that he had altogether overcome the workmen's opposition. His reputation had gone abroad as a master full of new-fangled fancies and hobbies, therefore he had been exposed to the further disadvantage of possessing a succession of restless, suspicious servants, flighty on their own account, and inclined to perpetual experiments on, and changes of, employers.

Then Oliver had been of a mind to show that he would not neglect any lawful means of improving his flour and bread, so he had set about introducing expensive new machinery into the mill and bakehouse. But being, after all, a green hand, without his father's practical experience in his double trade, the young man

committed several astounding blunders in the adoption of the machinery, and was much out of pocket as a punishment for the errors of his ignorance. The result awoke no small amount of jeering, crowing, and laughter at the leading tea and supper tables of Friarton.

Oliver's inner man had not fared better during these three harassing years. Fan's house was not a second home to him. The sole effect, so far as he could see, of his striving to fraternise in the true sense with the Dadds and the Polleys was that he had succeeded in arousing in his father's old allies a hostile and mocking temper, not pleasant to encounter. Since his quarrel with Jack Dadd, the old Dadds, who naturally took their son's part, had fought shy of Oliver Constable; and he had also, in some manner, he could not for the life of him tell how, given serious offence to the whole Polley family. He supposed they were enlisted, with hot, resentful party spirit, or

what they mistook for party spirit, on Jack Dadd's side. Oliver was half right, half wrong. For he was incapable of perceiving the other and major ground of complaint which the Polleys had against him—because, after raising false expectations, he had stopped short of seeking to keep company either with 'Liza or one of her sisters, in the prospect of matrimony.

Mrs. Hilliard had never gone so far as to shut her door against Oliver Constable. Nay, she had been so candid as to admit with pleasure that her later prognostications with regard to him had been premature, and in the main erroneous. But Oliver's chief inducement—as he had come to acknowledge to himself after there was no further need of crushing it down—for availing himself of the privilege of visiting at the Meadows, had vanished from the date of the terrible illness which had seized on Catherine Hilliard. It was one of the worst of

those indefinite, incalculable, nervous illnesses, bred of the conditions of modern life, which have no beginning and no end, which baffle by their very intangibility and paralyse by their unrelaxing clutch, and one of whose horrors is that in their abnormal character they may develop symptoms piteously fantastic and grotesque, like the antics of madness. Such illnesses, dreaded not without cause, are apt, when they spare the wasted life, to reduce the patient to a state of unrelieved, permanent prostration and chronic invalidism, which is death in life.

Catherine Hilliard had drifted away from her friends on the misty, dreary sea of illness which had no shore, till she seemed lost to them here, till even to Oliver Constable—who now owned to himself, like the *Bursch* in the famous *Burschenlied*, that he had loved her always and would love her throughout eternity—she survived chiefly as the aching, melancholy

thought of the girl who had been capable of dreaming noble things, but who had not been able to grasp the truth that behind the commonest, even the most sordid, absolutely repulsive details of human life, there exist nobler things still than man or woman ever dreamt of in their highest philosophy.

And the brute creation, which Catherine Hilliard had so loved, preferring it to the human, drew dumbly and wistfully away from the decline of her humanity ; while the book world in which she had elected to dwell, crumbled into dust around her. She had left books too behind her, and the beings that peopled her present existence were more visionary than the ghosts she had formerly chosen for her company.

Oliver could only look forward to her deliverance from this last bondage to the unreal, by her entrance on unsealed and everlasting verities.

Then it was when Oliver was most tempted to regard his enterprise as a wretched disappointment, he was called on to take up the burden of another man's failure.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PRICE AT WHICH HARRY STANHOPE
WAS RESCUED.

THE first thing to be done for Harry Stanhope was to get him out of the situation for which he was utterly unfit, into which he had thrust himself—to extricate him from the network of idleness, false activity, unsuitable companionship, debt, and dissipation in which he was entangled. In some respects the feat was not only practicable, it was comparatively easy. Harry had proved himself so thoroughly incapable a farmer, that it was not likely any sane landlord would be urgent to keep this tenant, particularly as his slender funds and a

part of his wife's portion were already flung to the winds, or rather sunk in the soil, and he had no more left to deposit in the land even if that had been his sole mode of spending money.

Old Peter Constable had believed in women's power of standing alone, and had left Fan absolutely mistress of her portion. Oliver had braved her indignation by asking her to have it settled on herself before her marriage. And certainly Harry Stanhope had not opposed the arrangement, for Harry was truly convinced of the treasure Fan was in herself, as well as habitually careless of pounds, shillings, and pence. Therefore, though he talked the jargon of his set—to Horace and others, and professed, as a claim to being a man of the world, not to be indifferent to tin—to the degree of counting on a woman's goods to eke out his resources, he did not really put much weight on Fan's bank-book and coupons, or

mind whether she kept them in her own hands or put them into his.

In the end, Fan, more as a means of vindicating Harry's disinterestedness than as a precaution for her own independence in days to come, allowed half of her portion to be tied up for her personal use if she should so ordain it. She would gladly have given up to Harry every shilling of this reserve, after he had disposed of the rest, had it not been that her foresight for him was not to say infinitely greater than his for himself or for her, but for any she could have exercised on her own account. Harry had become to his wife, in all worldly respects, like one of those minors or infants in the eyes of the law, with regard to whom it is his protector's duty to defend him from the dangers of his own helplessness and to hedge him round with artificial barriers. Still Fan was eminently an upright woman, and she would have fought against her despair and nerved herself to strip

—not herself alone but Harry, of her remaining possessions, in order to discharge the debts which he had contrived to incur in spite of her, rather than let them fall upon her brother, if she had not known that even supposing she could get Oliver to forego what all concerned in it called his ‘loans,’ it would only be a form. It could not prevent him from being impoverished in the long run, because it must be on Oliver the little family at Copley Grange Farm would have to depend, till its mistress was strong enough, if she ever were strong again, to struggle to secure independence—not merely for herself and Harry, but for Horace whose oars were shipped in Harry’s boat.

There was no difficulty on Harry’s side; he had never been overburdened with scruples, and he hardly suffered from any in accepting Oliver Constable’s interposition to free him—Harry, from his mess at Oliver’s cost. For indubitably there were money penalties, the

extent of which even Fan did not guess, to pay all round, before the volunteer yeoman-farmer could be withdrawn from the ranks of the yeomen, released from the obligations of his lease, and granted a discharge by his creditors, while it was Oliver who, in each instance, paid the defalcation.

Oliver did not grudge it so much when he found that Harry, sick of the whole concern, readily consented to go abroad at once with his wife, brother, and brother-in-law—who appreciated the concession and was conscious of a lurking sweetness and graciousness in his unstable prodigal's freedom from resentment at the old sap and grinder Constable's interference and assumption, however carefully masked, or however dearly bought, of the reins of government.

Yet, after all, paradoxical as it may sound, dogged resistance would most assuredly have promised better than unconditional submission

for Harry's ultimate attainment of moral manhood.

‘Charity begins at home,’ Oliver told himself, using the proverb in a sense which satisfied him, when he reckoned up the damage to his own prospects, of leaving the mill and bakehouse in the charge of a dolt like Ned Green, and a foreman thirty years younger and a whole century less acute and discreet than Jim Hull. ‘I have always desired to be kept from developing into a monster, made up of theories like Maximilian Robespierre,’ he assured himself farther, with a faint smile; ‘and no doubt it is the finest thing which can happen to me—myself, to be forced to skedaddle across the Channel, and potter about foreign towns with Fan and her small family. It will knock the starch out of me in no time, and take me down ever so many pegs in my priggishness.’

The sum of Oliver's project for the Stanhopes, in the meantime, was to cut off Harry

from his moorings and their tendencies, to furnish him with the substitutes of movement and variety, to afford Fan the change, rest, and recruiting of which she was sorely in need, till something more effectual should be devised to rebuild the ruined home, and replace the lost opportunities. It was a humble enough programme, not very interesting and exciting, save for the main thread of the drama, on which all the rest hung, and on which the performers were shamefacedly silent.

Most people have experienced the peculiar fascination and absorption which is caused by dangerous illness in a family, when the whole interests of life centre in the sick-room and its bulletins. All outside matters, though they might formerly have been regarded as of vital moment, dwindle into insignificance, until the wide world with its empires and peoples, tottering republics and falling thrones, and nations wresting their liberties at the expense of bloody

battles in which men by thousands perish uncounted, scarcely noticed—are blotted out for the time by a few feet of flooring and ceiling, a single bed, one figure lying still with half-closed eyes and half-parted lips, faintly beating heart and fluttering breath.

Harry Stanhope had acquired, as his companions knew, the taint of a grievous disease, half physical, half spiritual, which may rank with the plague and cholera among moral maladies. So to watch stealthily his symptoms, note the changes in his state, chronicle with trembling hope his progress in throwing off the deeply injected poison, or to recognise with sinking heart its fresh outbreak and farther spread through the system, laid hold upon and monopolised the thoughts of the little party of which Harry was the half-unconscious sick man, till he engrossed them more and more, as the combat thickened, and final victory or defeat drew nearer and nearer.

Sometimes Harry would rise so far above his ailment as to lose the worst of the disfiguring traces which it was stamping on his outer man. He would be for days and weeks together the easily entertained, contented, manly lad of the past. He would be as simple and pleasant as an unspoilt schoolboy, as charmed to go or stay with Fan as in the days of their courtship, as united to Horry as when the brothers were loving children, as satisfied with chaffing Constable, and proving the life of his own circle, where animal spirits were in request, as if there did not exist for him more highly-flavoured attractions, more enthralling society—a coarse and powerful supplementary source of excitement.

In these moods, when Harry was restored to his right mind, he was—without a grain of hypocrisy, so frank and free, so irresistibly helpful to children and old people, so easily served by servants, that he won, without fail,

the heart of every stranger with whom he came in contact. He was the charming fellow-traveller, at each *table-d'hôte* and in every steamboat and railway carriage, of hosts of unknown travellers, native and foreign. Harry was the great social conductor and bond of union between the whirling world around him and the rest of his party, who smiled cheerfully, and accepted with gay grumbling their share of the plague of his popularity.

Then such a transformation came over the patient that clear brow and eyes, broad shoulders, active hands and feet and tongue grew as if they belonged to an entirely different person. Here was a man in the toils of raging fever, and possessed by its delusions, with the load of a nameless unbearable oppression on his lowering forehead, the gleam of a strange fire in his burning eyes, having his head bent, and his back slouched with the gait of an incorrigible vagabond, who must escape from the most

sacred bonds and solemn obligations, and carry a distracted spirit ill at ease, and which cannot rest, into kindred storm and darkness. Why, the very muscular hands were straining and quivering to clutch the deadly foe, bound to overthrow the victim in the hateful encounter; the swift feet were stumbling in their frenzied haste to reach the goal from which there is seldom a return; the tongue spoke winning words no more, but stammered with the language of unreasoning fury and aimless invective.

When the demon of his craving for strong drink leaped upon Harry and held him, he broke from every other detaining grasp. It was to no purpose that Fan, Horace, and Oliver put force on their inclinations in order to go with desperate perseverance on the endless round of theatres, public gardens, and concerts, as if the travellers had been so many schoolboys abroad for their holidays, or as if individual tastes and

domestic habits were unknown to the party. Harry would not suffer Fan by his side; he shook off his brother and Oliver. He quitted them, and defied them to follow him, or he fled from them and outsped them by the terrible strength and subtlety of his madness. They lost him for intervals of hours, increasing to days and even weeks. The journeyings of the party came to an abrupt stop; all their previous arrangements were upset.

Fan and Horry, with Oliver added as a third to the group, looked at each other, on the first sign of the repetition of the miserable scenes, as the two had looked in the familiar farmhouse at home.

Sometimes Fan sat alone in the strange hotel room listening to the careless coming and going of the other travellers; through the long hours from sunset to darkness and the white glimmering dawn, while Horace and Oliver, going different ways, hunted through

all the *places* and *markts*; the hotels and cafés—conspicuous or obscure—the houses of entertainment where questionable hosts received strangers more likely to prove thieves than angels taken in unawares—the hunters studiously keeping themselves, as far as they might, unseen, till they stalked their prey. Thrice happy for all if it had been the beast of the field, and not merely a creature made in the image of God, degraded into a condition lower than that of the brutes, over which he had been ordained lord and king. A horse or a dog would have been wiser than Harry Stanhope, and would have guided him with advantage, in the circumstances. Or it might be the man-stalkers returned, with reluctant feet, empty hands, and hanging heads, to the hapless woman condemned to sit and wait in vain.

In these altered times, Harry, who was so fond of his kind, constituted the great insurmountable obstacle to any genial fraternisation

between his family and other travelling parties who were in the wholesome odour of unsullied respectability and the vigour and gladness of moral health and strength. He condemned his companions—not simply to a tedious and irritating quarantine, but to a sad and chilling isolation, as they drew away from their neighbours to hide their wound and its humiliating cause under a tightly grasped mantle, which must never be thrown open.

The isolation served only to draw the group more closely together, and to engage them, with still greater usurpation of their faculties, in their deeply human office, till Oliver became well-nigh as wrapped up as Fan and Horace were, in that vocation of nurse and brother's keeper, which—whether it be of the body or the soul—passes with practice into the most enticing and devouring of pursuits. Witness how it lures its recruits from the brightest and most peaceful quarters, and holds its brave soldiers

fast, resisting all remonstrance, till they drop at their posts in dens of squalor and misery.

Time and place ceased largely to exert their power over persons bound up in one man's fortunes in a prolonged and terrible single combat.

- What difference did the varying seasons make, when spring stole on to summer, and summer glided into autumn, and autumn stiffened and froze into winter, if yet there was no sure amendment or certain decline in Harry Stanhope's condition? What did it matter whether the battle-ground were the heaths of Brittany, the stony vineyards of Burgundy, the fat pastures of Guelderland, the forests of Flanders, the olive and orange gardens wet with the spray of the Mediterranean in the Riviera; or whether the towns offered to the visitors the picturesque gables and roofs of Bruges or Nüremberg, the palaces of Genoa, or the churches of Venice, when the question still

was Harry and Harry only? How long was it since there had been an outbreak of his mania? Was he steadier this month than last? Was there any hope left?

It is not merely religious, or what many would call fanatical, people who are brought to comprehend the sorrowful wonder of the demand, 'What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' For the fate of a soul even here in the light of goodness and loyal obedience to God's laws, or of turbulent rebellion against them, with all future honour and happiness, or all future disgrace and misery at stake—be it in the case of a not otherwise lad like Harry Stanhope—is really of greater moment and of more intense interest to kindred humanity, than all the natural beauties and all the acted out history of the universe. Place a drowning man in juxtaposition with the finest, most suggestive landscape in the world; and what spectator—not to speak of the un-

happy mortal's familiar friends, would not—conscious of his fellow-creature's strait—turn his back on senseless matter and the dead past? Unless, indeed, the looker-on were morally dwarfed, distorted, and hardened almost beyond recognition by his kind crying shame on him; with honest disgust for his unnatural conduct, he would watch, if he could do no more, with a sympathetic agony of eagerness, the hard fight for life of his perishing brother—how he clutched desperately each bough and every twig in his path,—how he struck out gallantly for a space till he was well-nigh beyond the engulfing wave,—how he faltered and gave way, and was sucked back into the insatiable jaws of the overmastering tide.

The Stanhopes, with Oliver in their company, went on like the wandering Jew, as if there were no end to their wandering, no rest for the soles of their feet. They lived their own throbbing, high-strung family life, till other lives

beyond theirs looked distant, pale, and dim, like lives in dreams. Tidings from the old home came to the wayfarers, and did not move them, or only awoke in them dull or fitful responses. A bachelor uncle of Harry and Horace Stanhope's died, and, with some dawning suspicion in his last days that he had left his brother's orphan boys very much to sink or swim as they could, sought to anticipate the moment of reckoning by an act of atonement. He chose to bequeath the sum of eight thousand pounds—the bulk of his savings in a colonial office—to the poor relations whom he had shunned and ignored as much as he could, in the course of their previous existence, instead of to the well-to-do flesh and blood whom he had hitherto exclusively cultivated.

The timely legacy—together with what was left of Fan's means, would form a little competence for the Stanhopes, if they made up their minds to settle in some quiet way abroad.

The subject scarcely struck any of the pilgrims in this light. Would it not rather deal the death-stroke to Harry by supplying him with independent funds, other than his wife's, for squandering and riot?

‘Poor old uncle Geof!’ said the man on his trial, with an impulse of his native kindliness; ‘to think he should be gone, and to cut up well for us, after all! For at least this legacy, though it ain’t much,’ continued Harry with a mixture of earnestness and candour, condescension and defiance peculiar to him, ‘ain’t too little for some enjoyment, without Fan and the rest of you looking glum. Come on, Horry; we’ll pay all respect to the old boy and his tin, by drinking to his memory to begin with, and then we’ll do whatever else enters our heads, to drive dull care away. Nobody can reasonably expect two fellows who have succeeded to a small fortune—and the smaller it is the less self-denial is to be looked for—to abstain from

a glorification or two. But we'll save enough to make you a handsome present, Fan, never fear. As for Constable, he's like the man in history, beyond being bought.'

Agneta wrote—to her brothers this time, to tell them of her approaching marriage, with the full approbation of her guardians, to Mr. Amyott of Copley Grange—of all men, the widower approaching middle age, the father of two or three girls, the biggest already higher than the writer's elbow.

'Aggie a stepmother! Why doesn't she go in for being a grandmother at once?' cried Harry, as his single derisive comment on an incident which, since it barely touched him, did not deserve more serious consideration.

'Ah! she was always fond of Copley Grange,' said Fan, with quick, womanly extenuation, as if it had been the manor-house and the squire that Agneta had known and prized.

‘But she is taking a great many duties and cares upon her at once, which seems a pity, when one thinks how many more must come in the course of nature,’ ended Fan in assumed matter-of-factness, and in the languor which had replaced her old fire. But she began again a moment afterwards. ‘It is not fair to herself and to what ought to have been her natural obligations.’ Fan spoke now with something of her former suppressed ardour and inextinguishable passion for justice; but tears of weakness gathered in her eyes at the same time. She was not thinking of Agneta’s future alone, but of the future of others with claims on their sister, which Fan, in the days of her strength, would have been the last to urge, and which Agneta appeared deliberately disqualifying herself from ever fulfilling.

‘Heaven help us! I think we are not very cordial in our congratulations,’ exclaimed Oliver impatiently. He was pricked by the troubled

consciousness that the cares as well as the pleasures of this life—the cares which are not of our seeking and which certainly do not contribute to our ease and satisfaction, are in danger of choking the good seed of generous thoughts and magnanimous judgments. ‘Can’t we wish Miss Stanhope and Mr. Amyott joy, without spotting all the real or imaginary disadvantages in their connection, and collaring the couple with the double chains of fulfilled and neglected requirements?’

A new idea was tickling Harry. ‘Look here, Horry; if we had stayed in the Farm we should have been Aggie’s tenants—bound to take off our hats to her. We might even have yoked ourselves into the carriage which brought her and her blooming bridegroom home from their marriage-tour. I wonder if she would have had an extra barrel of beer broached for my benefit? She has some small notion of the depth of my thirst. Wouldn’t it have been jolly?’

By Jove! we've spoilt an interesting episode for the county paper. "Charming tableau of attached relations forgetting the accidental diversities of rank and fortune and rushing into each other's arms." Don't frown, Fan, my love; you would not have been called on to drag Aggie up the drive hooraying for our master and mistress. You would have sat at ease, over the way, and witnessed the gala from a respectful distance.'

'If it is any gratification to you to talk nonsense, Harry, why then, do it,' said Fan, with a lingering reflection of her old girlish dignity, in the middle of her womanly pain at his want of comprehension and feeling, and yet with the pathetic indulgence to every defect in the man she loved, which far transcended both dignity and pain.

Oliver knew he was still capable of quite another form of selfishness, when a letter from Mrs. Hilliard reached Fan. Mrs. Hilliard

would not consent to lose sight of her kindred in exile, any more than when settled in a mill and bakehouse at her door. She had no further occasion, indeed, to acknowledge Fan's triumph and pay it homage, but the eventual defeat of Mrs. Hilliard's enemy was disarming in another way. Mrs. Hilliard was interested to learn what farther reversal of parts might occur among her cousins; and whether poor dear Harry Stanhope was to prove the reprobate out and out, as she rather feared would be the end. But nobody could help it save himself, he was the sole person to blame. It was Philistinish of the Constables to throw themselves into the breach, and make such a fuss about what was so likely to happen. It would have been far better for everybody to have hushed it up, to have put poor Harry and his drag of a brother quietly out of the way—not by murder, which might have had unpleasant consequences, but by banishment for life, while

Fan came home to her brother. But these cousins of Mrs. Hilliard's were not like anybody else, and would not behave like rational people in the common lot of having a prodigal among them.

Mrs. Hilliard's letter was not purely inquisitive; she was really softened by the news she had to tell, though she told it in her own manner. Her cousin Catherine was better. She had surmounted the crisis of her illness, and she was not only to live and be well again, she was about to turn over a new leaf—in short, to go a-head and look alive for the rest of her days. Mrs. Hilliard flattered herself *that* would astonish her readers. The miracle had been worked by the new order of nurse whom the London physician had brought down just in time to their assistance. It had been during the very dimmallest part of Catherine's illness, when Mrs. Hilliard's sole refuge from the blues on her own account, had been

in the anticipation of the inconsistencies and incongruities she was to encounter in the latest specimen of nurse—who is no longer a Sairey Gamp but a beneficent princess in disguise. Now beneficent princesses are charming to think of, but naturally one would suppose they are not the easiest persons to accommodate and entertain. Mrs. Hilliard had, therefore, proposed to lay all the house under contribution for the Sister's benefit. She had told off her own maid in the stranger's service. The maid's mistress had even had some idea of converting herself into an abigail, that she might more fittingly hold pins for her social superior, who was condescending to attend on Catherine. Mrs. Hilliard had arranged levees of all the ladies in Friarton to be held in the Meadows' drawing-room in honour of the Sister when she was off duty and open to recreation; and sure enough the Sister had turned out to be a daughter of the old lord-lieutenant's, the county

belle of ten years ago ; but she had laughed to scorn the words ‘accommodation,’ ‘entertainment,’ and ‘homage.’

She had perversely chosen and doggedly stuck to a housemaid’s bedroom, because it was nearest to Catherine’s room. She had insisted on putting in for herself the few pins which her holland gown required. She was so enlivened by her work in the sick-room that she came out of it looking as fresh as a daisy and as gay as a lark. When she had an hour to spare, or wanted a little variety, she took it in running about the town to rout out sickness among the miserable wretches who could not afford a nurse of any kind, and then in seeking to trace the mischief to its origin and destroy its sheet anchors of poverty and dirt. She had caused the two doctors’ hair to stand on end, forced the vicar to tear what hair was left on his head, and all but driven the youngest and most enthusiastic of the curates

to hang himself. In fine, the Sister had imparted to Mrs. Hilliard the remarkable information that she looked on this apparently lowest department of her profession as in fact the highest, and had been guilty of selecting it for herself. She had only consented to come down and nurse so swell a patient as Catherine because she was in extremity, and because the Sister had some special acquaintance with nervous disorders and skill in treating them.

Catherine had opened her eyes at the princess in disguise, of course penetrating the disguise, from the first moment she saw her. The sick woman had come under the spell of the nurse's vitality until everybody who could make a diagnosis said the one craze would cast out the other, the craze of work would expel the craze of lethargy, the craze of social regeneration would break the back of individual despondency and despair. Thus Mrs. Hilliard

wrote, and Oliver was free to think over the news.

Catherine alive, in health, awakened from her long unhealthy sleep with its haunting nightmares ! Catherine loosed from her grave-clothes ! Catherine informed of the riches of life, stretching out her hands to take them for herself and share them with others ! If he could but see and speak with Catherine now, would she not understand him, and feel with him at last, whatever came of it ?

But to see Catherine, with whom all was well, Oliver must abandon Fan in her tribulation, when, in the light of a fresh trial hanging over her, she had more need of his help than ever.

Oliver could not find it in his heart to quit his post under such conditions, though it was also in his heart to writhe and fret at what might have been, and the possible forfeiture of his own chance of human happiness. But he

was also capable of feeling thankful that it was—as he had every reason to believe—only his own happiness, not Catherine's—above all, not her well-being, which might be at stake. He was not put to the torture of having to choose between Fan and Catherine in this supreme sense.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST PENNY PAID.

THE end came, as it often does after long anxiety, when least expected. The travelling party had been under the necessity of staying their wanderings and pitching their tent for a longer season than usual. For many reasons the leaders had chosen one of the loveliest and most admired scenes in Europe for their temporary resting place. It was early summer again, so that the Stanhopes might resort to a mountain and lake district where the air braced every nerve, and which afforded opportunity for feats of climbing and boating, to attract and occupy that member of the family whose

delectation and employment were always the first cares, while the weary might rest in preparation for a fresh campaign.

The lake of the four cantons lay shimmering in its beauty, peacock-green or blue-black in tint as it happened to be in light or in shade. Great walnut-trees grew by its margin, and dipped their branches in its waters, while the most stunted pines ceased to flourish on the bare short grass or the rocky summits of its giant guardians. There were lower mountains that would have been well-grown mountains anywhere else, which rose sheer from the lake, and were clothed with waving wood from the soles of their feet to the crown of their heads; but one forgot them in the near presence of the bald Rhigi and the desolate Pilatus and the remoter vision of the blue range of the Engelberg seamed and tracked with everlasting snows.

The little burgher town, so grandly framed,

was not altogether smoothed down from its ancient ruggedness and picturesqueness into modern commonplace uniformity, or, still worse, smartness. True, its great hotels, with bands of music for evening promenaders, were trying to the sensitive visitor, and its shops with their staple of carved wood, however pretty, and verging here and there on art proper, were not without their objections. But there was something to be said for the old covered rickety bridges over the pale green water, with the rude representations of the grotesque horrors of the Dance of Death; the Water Tower; the bold rough rendering on the face of the rock of the great sculptor's idea of the lion of Switzerland, wounded to death, its paw still defending the broken lily of France.

Apart from a Babel of tongues, in which English prevailed, and swarms of motley tourists with the Rhigi railway as the scientific means to the desired end of attaining a region

so strange in giddy height and width of view, so familiar by the descriptions and raptures of its crowds of admirers—and those inevitable attributes of Lucerne, were not very conspicuous in the early summer when the Stanhopes occupied their quarters—there were two distinct, even discordant, associations sharing the ground between them. There were the more vivid and recent traces of what all well-instructed, incredulous people now call the myth of William Tell—the national hero whose imaginary personality struck the first blow in breaking the fetters—doubtless as fabulous as the rest—of his country. Certainly, the common representation of him in a stage kilt, theatrically administering the oath of allegiance to his equally fantastic fellow-conspirators, as it figured in cheap photographs, was not calculated to inspire faith in his identity.

There was also the mediæval legend which,

in its wild superstition, belonged to all Christendom, of the unrighteous judge who falsely condemned, not his lord and king alone, but the King of kings and the Saviour of men. And there was not found any place for repentance, in men's horrified minds, for this traitor any more than for the arch-traitor. Pontius Pilate was doomed for ever to hide his white, conscience-stricken face, and wring his accursed, palsied hands with a feeble show of washing away the innocent blood from which no holy baptism of water could cleanse them.

Constantly as the sun rose or set on the glorious world of mountain peaks, wood, and water, these two idealised memories awoke and rose in conflict, glimmering through the white mists of morning, or brooding under the purple vault of night—the honest, brave Swiss freeman who bade all Swiss slaves go free—the false-hearted Roman coward who saw no evil in this man, and yet delivered up the Deliverer of the

World into the hands of his deadly foes to do with Him what they would.

At Lucerne, Fan's baby was born. To the mother her little daughter came as an angel from heaven, promising her a fresh paradise instead of the old, which had turned out but a waste howling wilderness with green oases here and there.

To the father the child brought the delight of a new toy with which he might play joyously for a while, and then, without thinking, break it. Harry had none of the trembling reverence and clumsy awkwardness, in the middle of their tenderness, which some inexperienced fathers betray on their first introduction to their offspring. Harry took his infant daughter in his arms without hesitation and dandled her like an expert at once. The nurse and all who saw his performance cried out he was the most charmingly fatherly young father who had ever been beheld.

To her Uncle Horace, the last arrival was simply a fresh possession of Harry's, a 'rum' and funny possession, with which the bachelor uncle was chary in having much to do, and that inflicted on him sundry spasms of bashfulness, but of which on the whole he did not disapprove.

As for Oliver, 'the little woman' made him more inclined to thank God and take courage. She was a tiny, weak weapon which might yet prove all-powerful in casting down strongholds and overthrowing a foul god, even the jovial Bacchus of Greek worship, which, seen near, was hideous as Dagon and cruel as Moloch.

But there came a speedy interruption to Fan's recovery. Harry, whom her danger and weakness, together with the gift she had made him, subdued for the moment, was devoted to her in those days. He was sitting by her sofa, when she started up, and fixing on him eyes full of the craving care of an inappeasable

anxiety, amazed and alarmed even Harry, who hardly knew what mental apprehension, any more than physical fear, meant, by the eager inquiry, 'Where's Harry?'

He hastened to soothe her by the assurance of his presence, without effect. He cried aloud, as he quailed before the blank non-recognition, and impatient denial of the glance which met his imploring looks, for Horry—Constable—any witness to convince Fan that here was Harry by her side.

The witnesses came quickly, and she knew each of them—down to the nurse who had been an utter stranger to her till within the last few weeks; but she did not know her husband, and she would not believe what the others said of his being himself, and of his standing in the room, the nearest of all to her, bending over her, clasping her hand. 'Where's Harry?' she continued to demand with terrible, heart-rending insistence.

The long strain had snapped the strings of the fine instrument at last. She cried for Harry day and night, in his sight and hearing. As she cried she broke the silence which she had only once before stirred in order to claim succour for him ; she poured forth in full measure her incalculable sufferings. She lived over again to one appalled auditor the long nights when she had sat listening for a footstep which never came, but was replaced by other footsteps, each, in its turn, causing her heart to bound with unwarrantable expectation, and sink in the sickness—growing always deadlier, of hope deferred ; till it seemed as if all the footsteps which approached and departed in ignorance and indifference, trod, deliberately and mercilessly, over her quivering heart, spurning it as they passed. She showed how the truest woman in the world had been fain to impose upon herself with miserable deceptions, before she had confessed, in the secrecy of her

own soul, that the fine gold of her idol was only base clay under its lacquer—how the most straightforward and sincere of human beings had been driven to play at the wretched game of keeping up appearances, of laying herself out to hoodwink her neighbours. She had been humbled in the dust as well as worn out by ceaseless struggles, and tortured to frenzy. Her sleep had gone from her eyes. Peace had been unknown to her—a God-fearing, Christ-loving woman.

The revelation was like the opening of those Books before which every son of man will smite his breast and call on the mountains to fall upon him and the hills to cover him. And Harry Stanhope's accuser, day and night, before God and his brethren, was the woman who loved him best, and would sooner have bitten her tongue out than said the lightest word to blame him.

Every effort was made to withdraw Harry

from the awful, ghastly ordeal. The instant Horace guessed instinctively what Fan was speaking of incessantly in the monotonous voice as tuneless as his own, which he could no longer catch so as to distinguish the words, he started forward with fury, as if he were mad himself, to drag Harry away; but Harry shook his brother off.

Oliver laid a firm hand on Harry's shoulder, but from that, too, Harry freed himself. 'Let me alone, Constable,' he gasped. 'My place is by my wife, and whatever I have done or left undone, I will stay with her and hear the last she has to say to me.'

None could dispute his right, and the men drew back; but there were still women's pitiful voices beseeching him to have mercy on himself. 'Go away, sir, for Heaven's sake—for her sake. She does not mean it; she does not know what she is saying. Your staying will do no good.'

But Harry would not listen to the entreaties, and in the end he heard no voice save Fan's. He stood there till her tale of martyrdom was burnt in and branded on his conscience. Under the operation his face did not grow sharp as Fan's sharpened, neither did his fair hair betray patches of grey, as her dark hair betrayed when it was pushed aside that the death-sweat might be wiped from her temples. Yet his whole aspect underwent such a change as it was hardly possible he could entirely lose, so as to become the same that he had been before. He grew perceptibly older-looking in those days which could be so easily counted, with the sudden stamp of ripening to withering, which rapid, mortal illness sometimes impresses even on an infant's face.

He had never before willingly encountered what was painful either to his senses or his sensibility. He had always selected the paths which were easiest and most agreeable to

himself, without too much regard to their going down hill. They had brought him to where the battle raged hottest in the Valley of the Shadow of Death; and though it was not himself, but another, who was slain—the fumes of the smoke, the clatter of the strife, the deep wounds, the flowing life-blood, the gloom of that valley of shadows, were not likely to depart utterly from his consciousness, and leave him in the light-hearted, light-headed carelessness, the hard, untempered blaze of sunshine, of his former experience.

Fan had forgotten her baby in that last whirl of the tempest which swept her away, but she remembered it in the end. In the pouring out of her tribulation without restraint, she had constantly called on Horace and Oliver to help Harry, who stood nailed to the ground there by her pillow. Then, when her voice was sinking into an indistinguishable murmur, and her hands letting go every earthly hold,

she felt gropingly for her child, and struggled to utter another sentence audibly. She did not speak for the child with her passing breath as so many mothers have spoken for their children. Fan's care for Harry had swallowed up her care for their child. She spoke to the unheeding, unconscious infant who for many a long year would be a helpless human being, needing tender fostering and watchful protection, and instead of recommending the child to the father, in the bewilderment of poor Fan's unapproachable fidelity to Harry, she recommended the father to the child. 'Baby, take care of Harry,' she managed to say, and with a few more fluttering breaths, died. The words of Fan's final, fond, foolish injunction were still ringing in Harry's ears when he staggered out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OLIVER'S RETURN.

DEATH, and not marriage, wipes out offences, clears scores, and opens the bolts and bars of shut hearts a little, for a brief space. Harry Stanhope's relations mostly wrote to condole with the young widower on the death of the wife whom they had never countenanced. Lord Mount Mallow—after all, only a connection by marriage, who happened to be then disporting himself in the playground of Europe, actually offered to defer climbing a mountain and come out of his way to grace Fan's funeral.

Agneta Amyott wrote impulsively, instead

of penning a letter in which, while the proprieties were well preserved, the writer committed herself to nothing. She was deeply grieved, not merely for her dear old Harry, but for her dear sister, her former kind friend, whom Agneta declared she would now give half the world to be able to see, if but once again. And what about the darling little baby? What could three young men make of such a charge? It was deplorable to think of it. Would Harry let her send a trustworthy person to fetch the baby, now that she had a home of her own to receive it in? There were the little Amyotts' nurse and nurseries all ready. She had not been able to speak to her husband yet, but she felt certain Mr. Amyott would not object. To be sure, the close of Agneta's letter, in which there was the first note of hesitation, sounded more natural than the beginning.

Harry rejected each overture not so much bitterly or pettishly, as with the first sternness

and obduracy which had ever burst up through his constitutional softness and irrepressible buoyancy. ‘Nobody shall mourn for Fan but the real mourners—you, Horry, and Constable and me.

‘Fan’s baby shall not be taken out of charity into the house of any man—or woman either. She shall not be brought up as we were, if I can help it.’

Fan’s baby succeeded to what was left of her mother’s little fortune; she might also have the reversion of what Harry and Horace could keep of their legacy. In the meantime she was not given over to the tender mercies of three ignorant men, though, even if she had, she might have fared worse. There was not a woman, high or low, in the Swiss hotel in which she had been born, who was not interested in the small specimen of humanity, and there was one woman—a hard-working clergyman’s hard-working wife, loitering and rather

pinning abroad while doing her best to get rid of the lagging, idle weeks of her husband's necessary holiday—who pounced upon the motherless baby as a windfall, or rather, as she would have called it, a Godsend.

Oliver had not been greatly attracted previously to these reverent Weatherleys, in any chance intercourse which he had held with them. He had respected them as very worthy people, but they had seemed to him, what they were, somewhat fanatical and narrow in their views. As for Harry Stanhope, no two persons could have been more widely removed from what he had proved hitherto, or could have possessed less in common with his past, than the strongly professional as well as pious couple who were taking, but scarcely enjoying, a compulsory breathing space in their toiling life.

But from the moment that Mrs. Weatherley's motherliness appropriated the care of Fan's baby, Harry, as it were, instinctively—with

another of his instincts of self-preservation probably—took to her and clung to her and her husband in his misery, with a pathetic dependence and trust, to which they were not slow to respond.

Indeed, Harry's remorse from an early stage assumed the form of contriteness rather than despair, his natural humility and amiability standing him in good stead here. Fan had willed his rescue from folly and evil with her whole devoted heart, and though he would never now have the consolation—the positive gladness, of proving to her that he was a rescued man, and so, of more than making up to her, in her love, for all the anguish he had cost her, he was still, in his present mood, eager to do what Fan had wished, to be as she had chosen for him, in his best interests. He trusted brokenly that it might atone—if it were only to her memory, that Fan might know he was sorry and was pulling himself up, somehow, sometime—that Fan's God

and his would accept and confirm the late repentance in the great redemption He has provided for sinners.

Poor Harry had never been proud, and he was not afflicted with the insane egotism which sees in its possessor an object of such consequence in the universe, to his Maker no less than to himself, that he must needs interfere with the working of human and divine love. Such a one-sided reasoner will hold, against every assurance to the contrary, that he has sinned beyond forgiveness, and it is too late for him to repent and think better of it. In fact, there is a false Mephistopheles dignity and subtle compensation in this conclusion, when shame, regret, and grief still take the attitude of resentful defiance.

But it was not so with Harry, not even in his way of regarding his baby. He did not turn from it, in the beginning, with the blind repugnance and unreasoning, unrighteous

grudge, with which some widowers are tempted to regard the child that has cost its mother her life. Certainly it was not her child, but her husband, who had killed Fan. Yet Harry might have been so far dishonest as to have given a sop to his conscience, by shifting a part of the responsibility and blame on the innocent child. He might have taken a cruel satisfaction in revenging Fan, by trampling alike on his own natural affections, and on the just claims of his infant daughter.

But Harry never did so. He seemed rather to transfer at once to the baby all the fondness for the mother which was thrown back on his hands, when she was taken from him. In addition he was ready to lavish on the child a double portion of the protecting affection which, so long as he was himself, he had shown to Horace.

Watching Harry in the new light of his mournful fatherhood, when he was called on, by

every generous and manly impulse, to be father and mother in one, to the mite whose best friend or worst foe, whose nearest natural guardian, he found himself, Oliver Constable arrived at a correct conclusion. If any mere human creature could help to make a man of Harry Stanhope, could raise him from his soulless levity and the vicious craving which was grafted on it, it was—strange yet natural to say, not a brave, devoted woman like Fan, who had gone down into the breach and held a shield over her husband, and striven vainly to be the stay to him which, had their relations to each other been what they ought, he should have proved to her—but this merest atom of a fellow-mortal, a thousand times weaker than Harry himself, who could neither appeal to him nor remonstrate with him, who could simply hang heavily upon him in her helplessness, and who was, humanly speaking, altogether at his mercy for happiness or wretchedness.

Oliver was inclined to believe that Harry's self-conviction had gone to the root of the matter, and that even his most mercurial temperament would never shake it off altogether.

Harry was well-nigh as sacred a trust bequeathed to Oliver by Fan as her child could be. Indeed, while there were many humane people to interpose and accept the gracious task of befriending the motherless babe, who would volunteer to fill the thankless office of standing by Harry and backing him in resisting the poison which was coursing through his veins, and the familiar demon that beset him? But in the meantime Oliver was not frightened to leave Harry Stanhope with his brother, his infant, and the Weatherleys. When Oliver recalled the last he confessed he had been unjust in asking incredulously who would bestow themselves on Harry unless to serve themselves by his undoing? So far from a knowledge of his former offences disposing

the Weatherleys to withdraw from the old offender, it would only attach them to him more firmly. For a sinner who had turned or who gave the faintest indication of turning from the error of his ways, had, if it be possible, an almost morbid fascination for the clergyman and his wife. They were not content with fulfilling the divine commission, and preaching the grand truth that their Master would have mercy and not sacrifice, their zeal ran away with their discretion until they would have preferred the dying thief to the Apostle Paul. They went the length of selecting for their friends and associates rueful transgressors, in preference to men and women who had been kept and had kept themselves, with infinite pains, from gross transgression. This enthusiastic weakness which caused the Weatherleys to dote on reclaimed burglars and pet converted infidels, almost to the cold exclusion of people who had refrained from picking and stealing,

and who had reverently trusted and believed, was apt to be fertile in producing wrath and restiveness in the intolerantly honest and loyal sections of the community ; and, what was still worse, in growing crops of hypocrisy and fraud among the hardened and desperately deceitful outcasts from society. But at least it rendered the couple safe to care for Harry Stanhope and do their best to help him, and Oliver did not think that Harry would abuse their kindness.

Oliver Constable did not hurry post haste, though he turned his face in the direction of Friarton Mill, when he separated from his companions, in the course of a few weeks after Fan's death. He knew that many changes as well as a great blank awaited him, and he sought to fit himself to meet them in a spirit of peace, as well as to find healing for his recent wound.

It was a soft, grey October afternoon when

Oliver, leaving the railway at an intermediate station as before, walked through the well-known fields in their autumn livery, and arrived at Friarton Mill.

As it chanced—a chance for which she would never forgive herself—Sally Pope, who had not been apprised of the exact date when he was likely to return, had gone on her yearly holiday to visit her relations. Only a strange young housemaid kept house and received Oliver, taking in good faith his assertion that he was her master.

The dreary reception had, as a compensation, a certain relief for the traveller; but he was not long left to his own thoughts. He had hardly eaten the meal which his servant improvised in a state of consternation, with regard to a future searching investigation and sharp condemnation of all deficiencies by old Sally, when he became aware, as he was in the act of strolling half mechanically across the

court, to his former smoking station in the mill gallery, that he was threatened already with visitors from Copley Grange. A lady and gentleman were walking across the park, and making straight for the picturesque old mill.

Oliver groaned under this ill-timed manifestation of the popular admiration shared between show places and show people, and prepared to make himself scarce. He stopped short in his retreat, and faced the intruders, the moment he recognised that they were Mr. and Mrs. Amyott.

The couple were the most put out by the encounter, for they had clearly not expected to meet the miller in his own domain. It might be that the squire was but partially informed of his young wife's former familiarity with Friarton Mill as well as with Copley Grange Farm, and that he had proposed to take advantage of the fine afternoon by making her better acquainted with what was, still more than the

artistic almshouses, a charming æsthetic advantage belonging to his place.

In that case Mrs. Amyott might have had some difficulty in evading the proposal, or she might have been fain, on her side, to get over the first visit to Friarton Mill in a new character, as early as possible, in the absence of its master.

These explanations were more probable than what had flashed across Oliver's mind, and caused him to contort his figure by one of his old excited, awkward movements, in a revulsion from a crying case of heartless selfishness. He had thought for an instant, could the Amyotts possibly have guessed the half-resolution which he was only turning over in his own mind, to let or even sell the mill and mill-house, and quit the neighbourhood, where there seemed nothing remaining for him to do, where he had tried his utmost to work out his notions of duty and a career, and had signally

failed? Did the Amyotts know, from Friarton gossip, that the Constables' baking business in the town had diminished to such a fraction that, in justice to himself and his coming creditors, Oliver must give up the premises from which the business had departed? Were his nearest neighbours seizing the first opportunity, with indecent haste and mean covetousness, to sound him, in the hope of, at the same time, obtaining Naboth's vineyard and getting rid of Mordecai at their gates?

Perhaps Mr. Amyott trusted to an immediate, tempting, and what he might imagine a substantially handsome offer of purchase, at a fancy price, to induce a man, impoverished and embarrassed by his crotchets, to sell his birth-right, and so to secure to the owners of Copley Grange what one of them had long craved. If that were so, a man might well pray to be delivered from the mania for high art, prevailing to the extinction of common feeling.

For was not the dainty bride, in her refinement of bridal finery—sobered down still further by the necessity of wearing a black gown, in memory of her brother's late low-born wife, keenly desirous, under her pretence of mourning, to cut away the last link between her and the Constables? And all the while she might have guessed, if she had cared to use her woman's wit, how much of old Peter Constable's honestly and laboriously earned money had gone to fill up the gaps left by Mrs. Amyott's brother's reckless improvidence.

It was only for a moment that Oliver indulged the suspicion. He saw almost immediately that the Amyotts were as much taken by surprise, and more put out, than he was, though they recovered themselves with the comparative celerity and ease of well-bred people, who were, by their nurture and position, master and mistress of social situations, and equal to any social difficulty.

For that matter, Agneta did such justice to her training and played her part so well, that Oliver felt inclined to think she was lost as a simple squire's wife, and ought to have been a duchess, if not a princess of some reigning royal family, or a queen in her own person. She exhibited precisely the proper amount of feeling for the occasion, without being overcome. She was touched, she was gently courteous and even friendly to Oliver, without overstepping the limits which the circumstance of her having become Mr. Amyott's wife imposed upon Harry Stanhope's sister. She alluded simply and sadly to 'the melancholy event' of Fan's death. She enquired with interest when he had heard from Harry, and expressed her earnest good wishes for the welfare of 'the dear little baby.' She broke off to thank him with grave sincerity for all he had done for her brothers—though, with regard to the last graciously grateful speech, Oliver could

not avoid the impression that Agneta considered him in some respects the obliged person, by having had it in his power to serve the Stanhopes.

When the conversation strayed to more general topics, Mrs. Amyott referred with a blending of judicious candour and tact—while her slightly stooping, and slightly grey, but well-preserved husband was paying her the lover-like compliment of listening with pleased attention to every word she said—to the changes which had taken place in the Mill court since she was there last. She displayed thus with perfect serenity a considerable acquaintance with the landmarks.

‘ Surely, Mr. Constable, there have been some boughs lopped from the willow; and, ah! you have had the old seat, which I used to call “ the Pilgrim’s seat,” removed from under the mulberry-bush!’

Every word was in such unexceptionable

taste ; Oliver was let down so gracefully and gradually from the terms which Agneta Stanhope had insisted on establishing between them, during those vanished summer days, that he was inclined to acquiesce in the squire's conviction that his last acquired 'gem' was the most finely polished in his whole collection of treasures.

In comparison, Mr. Amyott's *rôle* required little from the performer, but he also acquitted himself admirably, with just the degree of admission of Oliver's claims which became a gentleman who would not disallow an obligation, and yet who viewed, with reason, the whole connection between Copley Grange Farm and Friarton Mill as a foolish mistake. But he, too, did not refuse to recollect the past. He made some cursory mention of his wife's brothers having been his tenants in the farm ; nay, he said with a smile in reference to his recent marriage, that the temporary arrange-

ment had helped in bringing about what was for him a most fortunate as well as permanent result. His first introduction to his wife had arisen from it. Such trifling causes are, in some sort, the motive power in shaping out our destinies.

Listening to her husband's flattering acknowledgment of the fortuitousness—for him—of her brothers' short tenancy of Copley Grange Farm, Agneta smiled sweetly back upon him. Mr. Amyott was somewhat worn and still more languid in his middle age; a man to whose over-cultivated nature much of the life around him, with which his wife's fresh youth had some instinctive sympathy, was rough, rude, boisterous, and oppressive, even when it was not offensive, so that the abiding expression of his aristocratic features was wistful and pensive, rather than resolute and hopeful: still he was a fine patrician-looking man, only a little past the prime of life, and a trifle the worse for the

wear. He was gentle and elegant—according to the old standard of elegance, in his whole tone ; a shade plaintive and fretful occasionally, but never morose or violent. He was deferential, almost to a fault, to the wishes of his wife, which he was well able to gratify, since he happened to be in the possession of an ample, unencumbered rent-roll, a charming place, so well-ordered an establishment that her stepchildren never came in their young stepmother's way, but fell at once into the pleasantest and most desirable relations with her, and a position second to few in the county. From Agneta's point of view, she had good cause to be satisfied with the marriage which had fulfilled the expectations of her guardians. Her education—whatever else it had stifled in her, had served to develop largely a reasonable prudence.

The Amyotts managed to make use of the fact of Oliver's arrival that very afternoon, as an excuse for not waiting to receive the invita-

tion to enter the Mill-house, which its master was in no haste to give, while both recognised that the omission on the first encounter served as an index of the extent of their future intercourse.

Left alone, Oliver acknowledged the happy couple were free from ulterior designs in invading his privacy. Apart from these, what was Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba? He had an idea that Harry and Horace Stanhope, with their baby, would settle down at a distance from Copley Grange, which would still farther simplify matters and smooth down awkwardnesses, so that in the future intercourse of the Manor-house and the Mill, Fan's marriage, with its girlish aspirations, would soon be as though it had never been—and it was best so.

Oliver reached the carved gallery at last, and leant over the balustrade looking down on the water of the Brook and away over the woody undulating ground of Copley Grange

Park, where the sombre green thorns were covered with dark crimson haws, and no note of a bird broke the stillness, which was only made alive by the monotonous babbling of the Brook. How vividly some of the more significant scenes of his life, since he attained manhood, rose before him there! The thorns were red and white again in flower, and the thrush was once more singing, as he broke to Fan his life-purpose, and combated her objections. How full of confidence he had been! With what high hopes and steadfast resolves he had entered on his mission, and it had come to nothing! He had been foiled on every side, till at last he was allowing himself to drift out of the struggle.

He was watching the ducks eating the mulberries, and turning his back, in vain, on a stalwart young figure cumbered with a limber attendant, belonging, by rights, to Oliver's gone-by 'Varsity days, and yet starting up,

stepping out there through the park, and hailing him on his threshold, in spite of him.

He was walking with Fan in her garden, listening to her unwonted chatter and warm admiration of these new friends.

The master baker was jostled, tripped up, and thrown down afresh by his late journeyman in the twilight lane yonder.

Oliver was cut dead anew by Catherine Hilliard in the High Street of Friarton.

The frost was on the ground while Harry Stanhope was besieging Oliver's bedroom door to announce his intentions; and presently the brother was facing the sister on the hearthrug, holding her back from her fate.

Oliver was grasping Fan's hands and pledging himself the devil should not have Harry. Oliver was binding himself to give up any grain which he might have gathered from the crop which had cost him so dear, that he might help her to lie on the bed which she had

made for herself. Yet Harry's deliverance had proved harder to effect than that of Tam Lane in the ballad. It had been beyond the power either of strong man or devoted woman, though it was just possible, after Fan's dead hands dropped the task, it might be performed by baby fingers in God's great way of nature.

Would Oliver, with his present knowledge, do all he had done over again, if the choice were once more given him? He thought it over deliberately and as calmly as he could, in trying to form his plans for the future, and he honestly believed he would. He solemnly thanked God for the boon of such a belief, to soften the soreness of his disappointment and defeat, and still the ache of his heart. The consciousness confirmed his faith that there had been some good in his aims. They had not owed their origin entirely to presumption and self-conceit. However rash and over-

confident he might have been, however much he had bungled the whole business, he had the assurance of his conscience that the fault had not lain largely in his motives. Yes, he would if he could begin it all over again—to establish higher principles of trade—to make trade honourable, to fill hungry mouths with wholesome food; and he would still have granted Fan's petition at all hazards. How did he know that he was to prove the pioneer of trade reformation, while he was well assured that he was his sister's natural refuge and stay? He could not have made himself strange to his own flesh, with whom his first duty lay. He must have acknowledged the obligation for charity to begin at home.

Before the dusk prevented him, Oliver took out and re-read Harry Stanhope's last letter. It was a little longer than the usual brief reports, which were hardly higher intellectual efforts than those of the young rustics whose

vicar has seen that they have profited by a night-school. This was the ordinary style of Harry's letters :—

‘ Dear Constable,—Here goes. We are all well. Baby is thriving. She has got her frocks shortened, and looks the better for it. It is still awfully hot. We—Harry and me, for Mr. and Mrs. Weatherley don't try the dodge—took a header, and had a swim in the river for an hour this morning. Woodhurst—that's the man whose ground lies all about here, is to let us have lots of fishing. I hope you're all right.

‘ Yours, &c.’

That was as nearly as possible the substance of the unclerkly scrawls which Harry sent. But to write at all, without compelling cause, was a great advance on the writer's native inconsiderateness and freedom from any comprehension of responsibility.

In the letter which Oliver held in his hand,

however, Harry, in his stumbling jerking manner, had contrived to say a good deal more.

The two Stanhopes had gone back with the Weatherleys, on the return of the clergyman and his wife to their country parish, and had found lodgings close to the vicarage where Mrs. Weatherley still had the baby in her kind care. It was the attraction of the baby—with the fear of doing it harm by removing it from the good offices of an experienced matron—which in the beginning drew Harry and his brother across the Channel, back to England, and down into the rural retirement of a remote parish. But it soon became plain that the Weatherleys—coming in contact with Harry Stanhope at a turning point in his life, getting him into their hands when his heart was wrung with suffering and his whole character subdued—had acquired a growing influence over the young man. He was rapidly adopting their forms of thought and turns of speech, and falling in, to some extent,

with their habits and practices. He had always possessed in a sense a ductile disposition, apt to take the moulding of its surroundings and associations. But a great wrench had been required to separate a thoughtless young fellow from his low atmosphere—laden with earthly vapours and dense with worldliness, and to launch him into the higher, rarer air of altogether loftier principles and considerations, breathed by the Weatherleys. Harry had suffered such a wrench and received such an impetus as propels many men—especially many shallow, impulsive men—to the opposite poles of their former opinions and pursuits.

At this epoch of his history—when Harry Stanhope turned inevitably, with a sick heart, from his old interests; when all his former sports, though he still engaged in them mechanically, were flat and stale to him; when what was spiritual in his moral constitution craved spiritual consolation and

refreshment—something beyond this world, some promise of reward and restoration for his lost love and its object, some reparation of all wrong, and enduring foundation for all good—Harry was carried out of the past in a totally new direction from any he had followed hitherto, where his brother would join him sooner or later.

Harry retained his simple cordiality, but the simplicity had got a new bias, and the cordiality a fresh outlet. In those letters—the occasional writing of which, without the inducement of borrowing money, was a marvel in itself—while he expressed himself scantily, there was also something of the transparent prattle though not the gush of a girl.

In the more recent prattle Oliver learnt a good deal of church services and parish work, in which, to his wonder at first, he found Harry was taking part. He had been practising with Mr. Weatherley's choir, and doing a little rudi-

mentary teaching in his schools, as well as helping Mrs. Weatherley with her parish children's annual feast and the machinery of her different clubs.

Harry did not dream of making the slightest apology for those extraordinary occupations. He was as free from self-consciousness now as ever. He mentioned the schools and the festival as naturally and unaffectedly as if he had been referring to a cricket-match and the dinner which followed. That struck Oliver as the most hopeful symptom in the case, and he was as devoutly glad as the Weatherleys could have wished.

But Oliver's gladness received a sudden check when he found Harry writing humbly enough, to be sure, of his unfitness for reading for orders, as Mr. Weatherley had just been suggesting he might do.

‘ Good heavens, I should think not ! ’ assented Oliver in a great heat. ‘ I am glad Harry

retains one iota of common sense, if Weatherley is so far out of his mind. Now, even supposing Harry has outlived his lamentable propensity—supposing he were to pass muster, I should have to interfere and speak to the bishop.’

But poor Harry was not really thinking of anything so far beyond him. He was only modestly preluding the statement that he had been with Mr. Weatherley when he was delivering some of his cottage addresses, and Harry had been moved and helped to say a word of warning from his own experience.

Was Harry in the way of being taught to go about and speak at such meetings? Had he, too, turned social reformer and preacher—in the last particular, as Oliver was free to admit, shrugging his shoulders, far outstripping his, Oliver’s, performances? Would Harry’s inveterate fancy for joining in whatever was going on, his incorrigible good-fellowship, thenceforth, or even for a time, take the shape of lay aid in

priestly ministrations, pointing Mr. Weatherley's morals by a word in season from a sinner who was a standing commentary on the vicar's text—at once a warning and an example, a young man who was ready to proclaim himself an evil-doer formerly, one who had known both the temptation and the penalty, but had escaped with the skin of his teeth? Would Harry, if he continued in well-doing, go on exposing his shortcomings, steeling himself in the exposure, till he should come to Fan's wrongs? Would he regard it as an act of expiation, and an offering for the good of his fellow-men, to speak out thus, and when his little daughter was old enough to listen to his words and understand them, would he still tell his piteous tale, and humble himself in her hearing—it might be in the hearing of some other evangelist's daughter or sister, who might have replaced Fan and become Harry's second wife, and the mother of his children?

Oliver writhed at the mere notion. He recalled Fan's strong, proud reserve in the middle of her ardour, her delicate reticence, her unconquerable shrinking from common speculation and coarse comment. Were the sacred secrets of her death-bed to be bruited about and made food for vulgar curiosity by this new kind of weak excess in the man who had inflicted the agony?

Then Oliver called himself back. Had he any right to sit in stern judgment on Harry Stanhope's weakness, granted that it was weakness even to self-indulgence? What if this were the sole refuge for Harry Stanhope, the only means by which the man whom Fan had so loved and striven to win, could be won to virtue and temperance? What if this were the single method by which Harry could serve his fellow-creatures? There are dull or besotted scholars who can receive no teaching save from homely, broad personalities, and there are

primitive teachers who if they are not personal are nothing. Such teaching might appear little better than foolish and despicable to Oliver Constable, and yet what assurance had he, in his arrogance and self-sufficiency, that it was not among the foolish things which God has chosen to confound the wise? Might not Fan, from her place among the angels, regard these ebullitions—which were at least frank and guileless—that vexed Oliver's soul, in an altogether different light from that in which she would have seen them, had she been still living an erring woman on earth?

No; let poor Harry do what seemed good unto him. God forbid that Oliver should put hindrances in Harry's path—the path which was, perhaps, best suited for his stumbling feet.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FRESH SERVICE.

ON the night of his return, Oliver had been tempted to say—

My wound is deep,
I fain would sleep,
Take thou the vanguard of the three ;

but the next day found him again leading the van. Happy the wounded who have still strength for the fight, and whose presence is yet wanted in the thick of the fray.

Sally Pope arrived at an early hour the following mornning, and gave her master her greeting. She was so full of self-reproach for her unlucky absence the previous evening that

it diverted her in some degree from the loud condolences which he was only too content to be spared. And Sally was a shrewd woman ; she knew that ‘men-folk do not care to return to the topic of their grief, as poor critters of women will discuss it at large, and find comfort in dwelling on their trials ;’ so when her single heartfelt lamentation for ‘poor Miss Fan as were that nimble and clever,’ had been made, Sally set herself to divert Oliver from the cold comfort of his lonely home-coming, by retailing to him all the latest news of Friarton.

‘Lord, Master Oliver, we’re not singular in our troubles ! There’s young Dadd down with fever, lying between life and death. Not a critter will enter Dadd’s shop—not to say the house, and the old people are nigh besides themselves.’

‘Poor Jack ! poor souls !’ said Oliver. ‘But what has become of the Sister—the wonderful nurse Mrs. Hilliard imported into the town ?’

‘Oh! she’s gone these three months, the more reason that Miss Hilliard is as spry as any of the rest of the young ladies. But now, Master Oliver,’ broke off Sally, putting her head on one side and speaking deprecatingly, almost mincingly, ‘I know as great allowance ought to be made for idle ladies, and that they mun be left for to direct themselves in many ways not open to the commonality, else they’ll fall to pieces like a dry wash-tub, or go all over red rust like a flat-iron laid aside, and be in danger of slipping through their friends’ fingers like Miss Hilliard all but slipped, and gave no end of trouble, the silly thing! Still, Master Oliver, do you think it is proper for ladies, as are none so old or ill-favoured, to go and get rid of their spare time—and all time is to spare with them—a-feeling of the pulses and looking at the tongues of sick carters and masons and their families, ay, and of tramps and their brats, a-treating of them to shoooken’-

up pillows and cooling drinks, and as many blisters and draughts as they can set their minds to—save us?’

‘Well, Sally, at least you’ll allow it is a good chance for the masons and tramps,’ said Oliver with a laugh.

‘I dunno,’ Sally shook her head. ‘I think the world’s turned upside down. But leastways better such folly than that Miss ‘Mily Polley’s been up to.’

‘What has Miss ‘Mily been up to?’

‘Gone and lost her good name, which she’ll never pick up again—not though she were the queen on the throne, with armies and navies to scour the world in search of it, at her word. Now there’s nothing left Miss ‘Mily save a patched-up marriage, to cover the disgrace as will not be covered, to a rolling stone of a ne’er-do-well that will bring her to want and misery. Her as was such a pert piece, setting herself up, picking holes in the coats of her

bettors, and giggling in her light-headedness at this body and that body, as if she herself were a non-such and could go her own road and fear no fall.' Sally ended with the cruel relish with which the old, who ought to be, and who, let us be thankful, often are, the most charitable, still sometimes, alas! under provocation, contemplate their young neighbours' receiving their deserts.

'You must be mistaken, Sally,' remonstrated Oliver, grieved and shocked. 'It cannot be as you say. The Polleys have always been most respectable people. Even Polley, though a useless sinner, picked himself up, you know. You must have taken some coarse scandal for gospel. Mrs. Polley has been a good mother, and has looked well after her daughters.'

'Excuse me, Master Oliver, but it's much you know of it, sir,' said Sally, half huffily, half scornfully. 'And it is little thanks Mrs.

Polley, poor woman, have got for her work in the shop and her rule of her family. She were a bit set up, in her own way, and vaunty of what she had done for them gals and that silly man of hers. Nobody came near herself, and nought that belonged to her was to be sneezed at. Ah! her mouth's shut now, and she won't hold up her head again, not by a long chalk, as she has done in Friarton. I am sorry for her though,' reflected Sally, showing some signs of relenting, 'for she were a through-going woman. Her took the whole load upon her own shoulders, when it fell off them sloping ones of Polley's, and asked help from nobody. Hard she drudged a dozen years back, never sparing herself, to keep her family out of the gutter. It was ill-done of any one of them to humble her pride. But it's the way of children—so it is. It's a comfort to the likes of me, as is a single woman, alone in the world, except for a niece and neffy or

two—looking after my savings I'll be bound, Master Oliver—to think that I might have had a man and bairns to my share, and been no better—rather worse served. But I'll fault Mrs. Polley with this—Sally returned to the charge—‘she would do everything in the shop with her ten fingers. She would keep the management of the books and accounts in her own hands. Why, them gals weren't properly brought up to the grocery business or to any other. They were as silly as silly could be, if you took them off weighing a pound of sugar, or cutting a bar of soap, as a child could do. Our Miss Fan could have bought them at the one end of the town and sold them at t'other. They went a deal of their time hand-idle, or falalling with their best clothes; and was that an up-bringing to keep them out of mischief? I have it on good authority, they would lay a-bed in the mornings, and they were out at their gadding every blessed even-

ing, though she pulled them up tight about minding meals and hours, and shutting up to her face. If they were quick, they could get their heads out—most of all Miss 'Mily, as was the mother's favourite—so it seems she had been drawing a score under her mother's nose, and carrying on at a fine rate with that scamp of a half gentleman—a pretty gentleman! Mrs. Sam Cobbes' Lon'on brother, though Mrs. Polley had forbidden her gal to have anything to say to him.'

'I should think so,' said Oliver, with decision. He knew the man—a fellow with a specious address, and the glamour of expectations from a rich uncle in the Customs, which served him as an apology for losing such mongrel situations as he occasionally condescended to fill, and for loafing away the greater portion of his days, hanging on to other and humbler relations than the autocrat in the Customs, the credulous Cobbes for instance, always in a lazy,

often in a disreputable fashion. He was just the sort of acquaintance, full of false pretensions, vulgar smartness, and strongly-flavoured dash, to take the fancy of an ignorant, ill-brought-up, wilful girl like 'Mily Polley. And on the man's side, he would not hesitate to amuse himself with her openly-expressed admiration, as the best joke going.

But Sally was eager to empty her budget. 'Mrs. Polley she finds out that 'Mily is snapping her fingers in her mother's face,' the storyteller resumed the thread of her narrative, nothing loth, 'and keeping company with Birt on the sly, continually; so the old woman's temper, as is none of the coolest at the best of times, flies into a blaze, and she up and dares the gal to see the fellow again, or she will be turned to the door, as not worthy of such a home, and to serve as a warning to her sisters. Mrs. Polley, if you please, never lets 'Mily out of her sight from that moment, ex-

cept at night, when the mother locks the gals' room door on them, in their hearing.

‘Sure enough, it is no more use than locking the stable-door after the horse has got his head out of the halter, and kicked up his heels in giving the stable-boy the go-by. And the black affront before the rest of the family—certain to leak out too, with the feeling of a gaol, after the liberty the gal had snatched, in spite of Mrs. Polley’s tantrums, druv Miss ‘Mily from bad to worse. She goes and throws dust into the eyes of them sillies of sisters, or else she scares them into telling no tales; she bribes the poor slavey of a maid. Any how, Master Oliver, she manages to give her mother the slip again, gets out of the house after it is shut up for the night, and runs and meets the scoundrel at the improperest hours. All is up with the foolish, wrong-headed lass’s good name then, Master Oliver, I need not go for to tell you. Mrs. Polley catches her youngest daughter a stealing

in at the airy-door, under cloud of night, and thrusts her out with her own hand, raging that 'Mily is never to cross her mother's honest threshold again. She will have nought more to say to the gal ; she may go back to where she came from.

'Them as told me,' said Sally, after a pause to recover her breath in her unconscious dramatising of the miserable details, 'maintained that Polley did interfere, and try to put in a word for his daughter ; but, in course, his wife would not hear him, and it do stand to reason that he has been so poor a critter, he has lost all title to be listened to. The long and the short of it is, the talk was over the whole town the next morning. The Cobbes took 'Mily in—they could not do less—with Birt, who had got the gal into trouble, their brother ; and 'Mily Polley is to be married, and go straight off to Lon'on, or Manchester, or Glasgow—one of them big towns—with her bargain next

week. Folk think Sam Cobbe's that ashamed, he has forked out the money—though he's none so rich, and the coal and potato trade ain't so flourishing—and has used all his influence to over-persuade Birt, by threatening to expose him to his uncle in the Customs, to make the gal the amends of marrying her against his will—the mean scuff.'

'I am afraid it is a bad business,' admitted Oliver sadly, compelled as he was to regard this lingering version, in a lower walk of life, of the wild, youthful escapades, and the half-brutal parental tyranny and violence which met the rebellion half way, that were to be found in every rank, before Christian civilisation did its work, a century and more ago. Now such evil tales were only possible among the desperately vicious of the highest, and the desperately ignorant of the lowest, ranks, or in the gross materialism and incapability of self-restraint which form the standing

reproach and grievous disfigurement, to set against the many virtues of that large class of smaller shopkeepers—to raise whom in the scale of humanity Oliver Constable had been willing to devote his life.

Oliver went immediately to Friarton to look after his own business. It did not take him long to despatch what he had to do. He had only to receive the last report from the not greatly interested foreman. It was quite what Oliver had expected. He went through it in less than an hour. It took him no more than ten minutes afterwards to write out, in the back shop, his announcement of giving up his father's and his own baking business—he could not pretend to sell the goodwill of what had ceased to pay its cost—to be inserted in the next week's Friarton's newspapers.

Oliver walked along the High Street afterwards, without happening to meet any save the most casual acquaintances. He passed the

Polleys' shop door, having a glimpse of Mrs. Polley with the purplish flush on her face to which she was liable, fixed in her cheeks, and a certain hard, set turn of the head and jerking activity of movement, as she served her customers. He knew that she would stand and do her work there, though the force she put on herself might involve the danger of her falling behind the counter. But he could not go in then, or for some time to come—not till the sough of the scandal in the family had so far died out, and the bitter mortification its head was experiencing, had partly worn off. Sympathy and condolence were not to be thought of here. They would be a positive insult.

But there was nothing to hinder Oliver from repairing to the Dadds', forgetful of the coolness between him and Jack, or rather spurred on by it to the quicker exercise of old friendship.

Oliver found the shop much as it had been described by Sally Pope, forsaken by customers, abandoned to the disheartened journeymen and shop-boys, with the goods either unexposed for sale or lying about in a state of confusion and disorder, which marked the absence or indifference of the masters. For both the Dadds had taken pride in their well-filled, well-kept shop. Friarton was somewhat given to panics in case of dangerous infectious diseases. The undaunted Sister who had brought light above the horizon had not stayed long enough to convert the town to her view of illness.

Oliver had barely time to enquire for the patient, when old Dadd hurried out from the back shop and accosted him. It was a relief to distinguish the voice of an old friend who had come voluntarily into the shop and was standing quietly leaning against the counter, instead of fleeing from the place, as if it were a pest-house. It almost exhilarated the

stout-hearted old man, who was keeping up bravely, to crack one of his old jokes.

‘Not come back yet a family man, Mr. Oliver? Not wholly without its advantage—I mean the bachelor state. Mind coming in farther? Bless you! *don’t* you mind? It will do Mrs. Dadd a power of good to see a strange face—as ain’t really strange—quite the contrary, and ain’t the doctor’s or one of them dratted nurses—which they never keep their time nor do their dooty properly, as the poor fellow needing them knows to his cost. His mother can’t watch day and night for weeks, and I’m but a poor hand at the trade,’ said the father wistfully, ‘though I would give a deal to take it up off-hand. But, you see, it don’t come natural like to a man as it do to a woman, and I wasn’t bred to it, in any sort, being come of a healthy family,’ rambled the linen-draper, staving off questions, as Oliver suspected, till they were through the back shop, up the stair

and into the vacant, dreary-looking best parlour, with its torn prescriptions cast heedlessly on the carpet and its tray of half-empty physic-bottles and slops put down recklessly on the edge of the table, where guests had been wont to see more substantial fare carefully deposited. Then old Dadd raised his fist and was about to bring it down on the table with a bang—which in the very act of being dealt, was caught up and so much suppressed that it barely caused the physic-bottles to jingle, because Jack's bedroom lay no farther off than the other side of the passage. 'Yes, sir, my boy Jack is swimming for his life, they tell me,' said the poor man, winking his eyes, knitting his brows hard, and speaking as if Oliver were about to question the statement.

The door behind them opened, and the unnaturally pitched voice sank into silence abruptly, while the late speaker turned eagerly to meet the new comer.

Mrs. Dadd had thought Oliver was the doctor, and entered hastily. At the sudden sight of her son's contemporary and old companion standing there in the flush of health and strength, she broke down, for a moment, more completely than Dadd had done, to his great dismay. For Mrs. Dadd was a mannerly woman—so far as she understood manners. She prided herself on being at home with sickness, and she was accustomed to say, she did not know what a woman was good for, unless it were to bear up on these occasions when a man was sure to give way. One gain that was got by her sinking into a chair and covering her face, in place of greeting Oliver, was that it roused old Dadd to bustle about in order to quiet her, and to seek to explain the strange state of matters to Oliver.

‘ Now, don't take on so, like a good soul ; he ain't worse since morning. No, I knew it. And don't you go for to think, Mr. Oliver, it's

any ill feeling to you that's sticking in the Missuss's throat. Nothing of the kind, sir. Why, that was all out of head with poor Jack himself—who was never a chap to bear malice, months ago. He said to me only the other day when this illness was coming on him; "I can't tell what ails me, father; it ain't my head, or my back, or my legs in petickler—only I feel seedy all over. I ain't fit for the shop, and I'm still less fit for a field-day"—you see the autumn manœuvres was coming on—"if it had been a year or two back, I might have gone out to Friarton Mill and had a quiet afternoon with Constable, and tried what that would have done for me. Yes," he said, "I remember there was bad blood between us; but I'm not so cock sure as I have been, that I had the best of it. Anyhow, Constable was the right sert to go to, at a pinch. You could look to be borne with, and set on your feet again

when you felt you had not a leg left to stand on, as it is my bad luck to do to-day.”’

‘That was very good of Jack,’ said Oliver warmly. ‘Then you’ll let me sit up with him to-night, since he’ll not mind ; perhaps he’ll rather like it. I don’t mean to boast of my qualifications as a nurse ; but I think you and Mrs. Dadd may trust me to see to the doctor’s orders.’

‘I should think so, Mr. Oliver,’ said Dadd with emphasis. ‘You are kind, and we are much indebted to you, as we’ll tell you better some day, please God. Others has offered, but none so hearty, or whom we could put such faith in,’ old Dadd astonished Oliver by saying. ‘And as to Jack’s minding or liking, bless you ! he don’t know his own mother from a stranger, and hasn’t these three days back.’

‘It’s that as has made me useless, Mr. Oliver,’ said Mrs. Dadd, sitting up and apologising feebly ; ‘so that I haven’t even had the grace to thank you for your offer.’

‘Never mind thanks,’ said Oliver. ‘Did my father go out of his way to thank you when you stayed at Friarton Mill and brought his little girl through her fever?’

‘Ah, that was different; that was all in a woman’s way for a motherless little thing, and I ran no risk, having had the scarlet fever myself when I was a child. I wish I had been with her at the last, poor soul! When her trouble came upon her, in a strange place, and none as she knew, save men to look after her, I reckon she would have cared then to see the face of an old acquaintance, as was a woman like herself and knew her needs. But the Lord will protect you, Mr. Oliver, as He may have raised you up, and sent you home, at this time, to save my dear Jack. May be it is the greatest mark of respect I could show you or any man, after all, to think of leaving my own lad in your care.’

Oliver did not know about having been raised up and sent home to save Jack Dadd,

but he said ‘Surely,’ with fervour to Mrs. Dadd’s passionate amendment on her formal thanks.

So Oliver was regularly installed, with the doctor’s consent, night-nurse to Jack Dadd; and in place of calling at the Meadows, he went out of the way to avoid the house and any chance of encountering Mrs. Hilliard or her cousin, as he passed backwards and forwards between the rooms above the shop in the High Street, Friarton, and Friarton Mill for a considerable number of mornings and evenings. Such fellow-townsmen as he met contented themselves with looking curiously after him, whether they stopped him to enquire for the sick man, or whether they crossed the street to shun the lightest breath of infection. An odd fish, Oliver Constable, not without feeling—strange to say—in his queer composition.

CHAPTER XXX.

STUMBLED ACROSS—INTERVIEWED—TAKEN AT
HIS WORD.

ONE night, before it was late, as Oliver was stooping over Jack, trying to ascertain whether he were really muttering irrelevantly,

‘ There’s Ruby, and Rover, and Ranter, too,’

or asking for something the sufferer wanted, a man’s figure in professional black, which was yet not the doctor’s, appeared on the opposite side of the bed. Oliver looked up—it was Mr. Holland, the Dadds’ and Oliver’s minister. He had not been there before—partly because he had been away on sick leave, partly because he had returned, only half recruited,

after the anxiously economised weeks at the sea-side with his family—difficult for the poor minister to afford in more ways than one. And his wife had so implored him not to put his shaken health and strength, not fairly re-established, to the severe test of a fever-laden atmosphere, that he had yielded reluctantly, and kept away from the unconscious Jack and his burdened father and mother, till Mr. Holland could do so no longer. Come what might of it, though it should cost him his own life, and his wife should be left a widow and his children fatherless, the pastor must be at his post ; and when he went to it, he found the rebel of his congregation hanging over the sick man—indifferent to inhaling the tainted vapours at the fountain-head.

Mr. Holland coloured high and hesitated.

Oliver looked up and spoke without the slightest difficulty, rather with a roughish freedom, born of the necessity of the moment.

‘Hallo, sir! are you there? Look here, Holland; from the colour of your coat, you have seen more sickness than I. Can you feel a pulse? Can you pronounce on the state of a tongue? You come as a stranger, you can tell how Jack strikes you. What do you think of his chance?’

Mr. Holland stepped forward and did as he was required. Oliver and he consulted together and watched and nursed Jack, without a thought of anybody besides, for some hours. Then, after the clergyman had taken up his hat to go, he hesitated once more, put it down again, and touched Oliver’s arm with a hand that shook slightly.

‘Brother,’ said Mr. Holland solemnly, in phraseology adopted both by Papists and Puritans in exceptional circumstances and seasons of strong feeling, ‘have you any objection to joining with me in prayer, and offering up an intercession for our sick brother?’

‘None in the world,’ replied Oliver promptly. And the two men prayed aloud by the voice of the one, for Jack Dadd.

The next Sunday, Mr. Holland preached a sermon, which slightly bewildered his hearers, on the text, ‘Not they who say “ Lord, Lord,” but they who do the will of my Father.’

The early October mornings were getting always darker—with a darkness which partook of white haze as well as dank wet, dimmer, chiller, when Oliver—buttoning up his great coat, as he came out of the Dadds’ house into the street, where last night’s lamps were still burning, and which had not yet woke up for the day, since not even an early milkman had put in an appearance—was startled by a woman in a bonnet and veil, hugging a shawl round her, coming out upon him from the nearest alley, and accosting him in a gasping, constrained voice.

‘Please, sir, can you tell me how Mr.—how Mr. Jack Dadd is going on this morning?’

enquired the speaker, with little pants between the broken utterances of the words.

In place of answering the question, Oliver exclaimed in amazement, 'Miss 'Liza Polley! What are you doing here at this hour of the morning?'

'Oh, Mr. Oliver, don't betray me!' cried poor 'Liza, in her natural voice, though it was quivering with distress and terror. 'I thought you would not know me. But never mind that just now; tell me quick, how is Jack? Oh! will he die, Mr. Oliver? Will Jack die?'

'I hope not,' said Oliver gently; 'he's no worse, and every hour gained is in his favour. But this is not a time for you to be out. It was not six when Mrs. Dadd took my seat. Let me see you home, Miss 'Liza, at once.'

'Oh! no, no, Mr. Oliver,' refused 'Liza, in a fresh paroxysm of alarm and trouble. Mother would be fit to kill me outright, if I came in with a man—with a gentleman, at this hour of

the morning--though it is morning—not night,’ pleaded ’Liza piteously ; ‘and old Betty Miles has come to wash, and had the door opened for her ’—taking further refuge in the business of the day’s having really begun—‘ or else I should not have dared to get up, and slip out at all. Oh dear ! You do not know how hard mother has grown, how hard everything is, since poor ’Mily went wrong,’ protested ’Liza, weeping, not violently, but in a crushed manner. ‘It is so dull you cannot think ! We dare not lift up our heads from our work, or make a joke, or speak of running out to pay a single call. Mother says we are all as bad as ’Mily, and have no sense or feeling. She is ashamed of us. No respectable people will wish us to darken their doors, or dream of returning our visits. But oh ! it would be nothing, Mr. Oliver,’ broke off ’Liza, returning to the dominant cause of her misery, ‘ if Jack Dadd were only a little better. Mother may do or say

what she chooses,' continued the girl, writhing like any other worm trodden on, and turning on its oppressor, 'I must and will hear how Jack is, or I shall go mad. Mother may serve me as she served 'Mily. I don't care, there! Anybody may hear me, and go and tell mother that likes.'

'Jack is highly honoured,' said Oliver, at a loss for any other observation. 'But now, don't you think, since he is no worse, and will soon, I trust, be a great deal better, it would be as well for you to take care of yourself, and do what your mother wishes you, for his sake, as well as hers, Miss 'Liza?'

'Oh! hush, hush! Don't say my name, in case anybody hear you,' 'Liza objected with the greatest inconsistency. 'You are a kind chap—that is, you are very good; but I did not mean you or anybody to see or know me. I thought you would not penetrate my disguise,' said 'Liza with solemn simplicity.

‘I was too clever,’ said Oliver, tempted to laugh.

‘But you will not think ill of me?’ besought ‘Liza—sinking again, in a moment, from the part of the heroine of romance she had formerly longed to play, which, even this morning, she had found some faint compensation in trying to support, for Jack was not dead, only very ill—into the affronted, unhappy, childish young woman. ‘You will not tell upon me? You see Jack Dadd and I have known each other all our days, and sometimes—well, he has looked and said things—though he was not always kind. He was fair angry because I let you talk to me first when you came back,’ explained ‘Liza, with a little hysterical giggle. ‘I am sure, Mr. Oliver, we two said nothing which all the world might not have heard, and Jack had given himself no right to interfere with me for speaking to anybody. Now mother

says nobody will ever care to come near us again, after the disgrace 'Mily has brought upon the family.' 'Liza began to droop afresh, and to cry without the most distant admixture of small triumphant laughter. 'It would be very hard and cruel, if it were true, for how could we—Ann and I, help it? Mother was always putting 'Mily before us,' complained Liza resentfully, 'and Jack and 'Mily would carry on together, just to plague me, I believe. Oh dear! what am I doing?'—stopping short and wringing her hands—'Blaming Jack when he may be dying or dead for aught I know; and I may never see or speak to him again in my life. But I should not mind that, if God would only let Jack live and get well and be happy, though it were all away from me. Oh! Mr. Oliver, will he live? Will Jack live?'

The poor delicate girl was quite spent and shaken. She was forced to let Oliver—who

was not without some apprehension of arousing the blind fury of Mrs. Polley—give her his arm within sight of her mother's door.

‘So that was the way of it?’ Oliver said to himself softly, as he walked away. ‘Poor thing! poor old Jack—who can hardly move a finger at this moment! And I came between them and made mischief, did I? without the faintest suspicion, in my stupid bungling? But, let us be thankful, it may not be too late to set this right if the beggar will only recover.’

Oliver was coming in to Jack, not going from him, when the gas-lights in the streets of Friarton looked white and bright and encouraging as they look with the night setting in—not yellow and faded and dispiriting, after a career of unwarrantable dissipation, according to their faithless discomfiting habit with the first streak of dawn.

There were still many people about, largely the promenaders, shoppers, and callers be-

longing to the classes to which day brings work and evening recreation, with the recreation consisting mainly of what is best expressed by the old-fashioned word ‘gadding’—going abroad and foraging for some little excitement in the way of gossip or otherwise. This was the season when the Polley girls had been wont to disport themselves among their acquaintances, till the striking of a clock sent them scampering and scuttling home, like Cinderella minus her glass slipper.

And sure enough ‘Mily Polley came forward in her conspicuous hat and outrageous skirt, bustling along as if all the business of Friarton were left for her to do, and meeting Oliver Constable in the face.

At the first glance she appeared perfectly unabashed. The only difference in her was that to the girlish pertness and boldness there was added a touch of the hard brazenness which defies such a position as hers. She was

alone—she espied Oliver at once. Her sharp eyes had never been known to miss man or woman, and now—far from being cast down, they were roving on all sides, challenging every passer-by. There was the complete contrast between 'Liza and 'Mily Polley which is generally to be found between the sinned against and the sinner. 'Mily attempted no foolish disguise. She was not seeking to escape from Oliver's recognition. She darted up to him, hailing him loudly—'Mr. Oliver Constable, it is a treat to see you now-a-days.'

Oliver stopped and spoke to 'Mily. She made no enquiry for Jack Dadd, or the most distant allusion to Oliver's recent loss. On the contrary, in full view of his mourning, she referred to the changes which had occurred lately, with boisterous gaiety. 'And there are more and greater changes coming, I can tell you, Mr. Oliver,' said 'Mily, in her glibest manner. 'I am turning my back on this dull

hole, I'm glad to say. I am to be married next Thursday ; the day is so near that I need not make a mystery of it. I dare say you have heard, though you have not wished me joy yet. If you were quicker about it, I might give you an invitation to my wedding.'

'Do,' said Oliver, on the impulse of the moment ; 'and I'll be happy to come in the character of an old friend.'

'Will you?' asked 'Mily, quickly and doubtfully. 'Will you, indeed, Mr. Oliver? Do you mean what you say?'

'Yes, of course.'

'That will be awfully good of you. I'll be as proud as a peacock ; no'—with a sudden flush—'not that, but very much obliged and thankful to show his friends that all the people I ever knew have not turned their backs upon me.' She finished with bitterness, still her voice and face betrayed some shame and regret. 'Would you mind walking and talking with me

a bit, Mr. Oliver?' she asked almost gently. 'We'll turn down into Jervis's yard, where there is nobody working at this hour. I should like to speak out to you this once. It is not late, and though it were, there's nobody to hinder me from stopping out till after ten, now. But, oh! Mr. Oliver'—breaking out passionately—'it was mother herself put the finishing touch to my folly. I had been wild and flown in her face, and disobeyed her, but I was not bad, when she turned me from my father's door, and locked it in my face. She has herself to thank for what came of it,—no, no, I don't mean that'—cried 'Mily, calling herself back with an accent of terror in her despair—'What is it the Bible says about them as curses father and mother? And it is only them as honours father and mother that lives long; so that any way I'm booked to die young like Jack Dadd and Fan—I beg your pardon, Mr. Oliver—Mrs. Harry Stanhope. Well, I've

got an inkling there are worse fates going. But it was heartless and ill done of me,' confessed poor 'Mily, with something like real contrition in the tears which welled up into her round eyes,—‘to come forward and look in your face, and at the band round your hat, and begin with my idle nonsense—only it's such sore nonsense now-a-days—you can't guess, Mr. Oliver. Did you ever think it would come to this—that my banns should be put up here, in Friarton, and my marriage-day next week, yet neither mother, nor 'Liza, nor any of them, should care to come near me? That they should not be able to tell what I'm to wear, or seek to bid me good-bye before I go?'

‘It will be better when you are gone,’ said Oliver. ‘Forgiveness and forgetfulness will come in time. You will try to do your best, 'Mily, God helping you, in the future, and when you come back ——’

‘I'll never come back, never,’ said 'Mily,

with strong conviction. ‘I’ll never show my face here again, though I’ve sought to look as if I did not care that I had met the disgrace, I deserved, I suppose. But you’ll come to my marriage, Mr. Oliver,’ pleaded ‘Mily, ‘and wish me the best that can happen to me, now? Birt will be pleased, because of your college breeding and connections, and will think more of me since a gentleman like you does not hold it beneath him to stand by me. And you will tell them at home some day, Mr. Oliver, what I wore—you’ll take a good stare at my bonnet and gown for the purpose—and how I looked, and that I had taken care, as far as I could, out of the little bit of money my aunt ‘Mily, as was also my godmother, left me, that everything about the marriage should be as slap-bang as the Cobbes could manage it? No doubt mother’s daughter, considering what mother has made of the shop, and what her bank-book comes to, might have been entitled to a great

deal more. I know I used to fancy I might be married in a white satin and go off in a carriage and pair at least,' replied 'Mily, half-proudly, half ruefully; 'still you'll see there will be nothing in the way the marriage is gone about, to affront mother and the rest—though none of them has come to look after my credit and theirs,' ended 'Mily, with a considerable flavour of the old woman lingering about her still.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LIFE—AND DEATH.

JACK DADD was more like a girl than ever—more like even than the puniest of pink and white complexioned lads—with whom to associate the idea of a bold, rude, fox-hunter or a slashing soldier, or a reckless buccaneer, as they had been represented in Jack's favourite songs, would have been the height of absurdity, pathetic in the very wildness of the imagination.

He was wasted and worn to skin and bone, and faded to the colour of blanched wax, lying with his eyes shut, though he was not sleeping. Yet Jack was considered to have got the turn, to be in a fair, though still a precarious, way of

recovery. Oliver had not altogether resigned his functions; he was with Jack this night again, sitting reading at a little distance from the bed, when he was startled by hearing a piping voice address him, and looking round, he saw Jack's eyes wide open, with reason in their glance, fixed upon him. It was a critical moment, for between delirium and sheer feebleness, Jack had not before shown any consciousness of Oliver's identity.

‘Noll,’ said Jack, ‘don’t you remember how I won your taws that time?’ referring to a famous, far-off, game of marbles in the Friar-ton playground.

Oliver was immensely relieved. ‘Yes, Jack, you beat me to sticks,’ he admitted candidly, while Jack emitted the ghost of a chuckle at the recollection of his old victory.

But Jack's next speech was not so reassuring. ‘Constable,’ said Jack, ‘I’ve often been guilty of rank impudence to you.’

‘Gammon!’ said Oliver; ‘shut up for the rest of the night, old boy; let me turn you round, and do you try and get another sleep, which will set you on your pins again in no time, and let me finish my book.’

But Jack’s hour for conversation had come, and he would not be silenced. ‘I say, Constable, I hope I may get over this bout, and be let off this time, to live and make up for some things I’ve done unlike—unlike a gentleman.’

Heaven help the lad! who was too shy in the middle of his forwardness to say a Christian, the young counter-jumper who had his own standard for a man and a gentleman.

‘You may live to behave like a prince, Jack, if you’ll only be careful and not exhaust yourself. Here; swallow this stuff, and snooze away.’

But Jack was at his confessions again, more briskly than before, the moment he had taken the stimulant. ‘I wonder if anybody but the

poor old guv'nor, and the mother, and perhaps a good fellow like you, Constable, would care whether I hopped the twig or not? I don't deserve it from some people. There's 'Liza—'Liza Polley—'Liza might not have always known her own mind, or rather, her friends went in and bamboozled her, and put a lot of nonsense into her head, but I was not quite fair to 'Liza. I came down hard upon her, when, as it turned out, you were not going after her, and when, if you will believe me,' said Jack, with emphasis, succeeding in raising himself on his elbow, 'she never cared a rap for you, it was me she cared for all the time—poor 'Liza!' ended Jack, falling back with a sigh.

The delicious *naïveté* of the assertion pleased Oliver greatly, while he hastened to give it a handsome corroboration. 'I am profoundly convinced of the truth of what you say, Jack; and if it would not bring on a fresh

attack of fever, I might generously tell you in return that Miss 'Liza Polley met me at break of day the other morning, daring the wrath of her mother, just to hear the last news of your health.'

'Did she, though?' exclaimed Jack, with his poor face brightening into a dim glow of satisfaction; 'and 'Liza is as frightened as a hare while her mother has been like a she-bear that has been robbed of her whelps, since she sent 'Mily up the spout.' There was a little pause. Oliver hoped Jack was dropping off to sleep. 'I'll not forget it of 'Liza Polley,' Jack spoke again, with drowsy, lordly magnanimity; 'it was the best errand she ever ran on. I'll act on the square to her—on the square all round, please God. And as for Mrs. Polley, won't the guv'nor make her squeak to a different tune, when he calls to pop the question to the mother for me?'

Yes, Jack was going to recover, to be a

man instead of a boy—a good man ‘please God,’ as he had said simply. And it would please the Father of Lights, the source and the reward of all goodness.

Death and desolation were distanced for once. The strange, sad sights, sounds, and memories which the King of Terrors, even though his sceptre has been wrested from his grasp, still brings with him, and leaves behind him wherever his ‘pale feet’ pass, would be changed for the cheery, sweet, common tokens of returning health and life: the fresh, open air, everyday work, the familiar faces of friends no longer anxious or averted.

Oliver felt it like a great boon to himself. He went to ‘Mily Polley’s marriage with much better spirit and hope, since there was no longer the least probability of his having to attend Jack Dadd’s funeral.

Oliver represented ‘Mily’s circle, though Sam Cobbe gave her away. An old friend

lent her his countenance when she needed it. For she was conscience-stricken and shame-smitten through all her defiance. She was really smarting keenly under the abandonment of her kindred. She was awaking silently—and when had 'Mily ever been silent before?—and sadly, already, even before he had made her his wife, to the utter poverty and short-lived nature of the passion which had existed between her and the man for whom she had—not generously but wilfully, sacrificed all that women hold dear. For this reason she was susceptible to the compliment of Oliver's presence even more than to the show of her gaudy blue silk gown and desperately smart bonnet and veil. She thanked him with an earnestness which struck Oliver in 'Mily, and which he considered far out of proportion to the cause of the thanks, in the last words she said to him. She went with her husband straight from the church to the railway-station,

as the Cobbes could not be expected to furnish the shabbiest version of a wedding-breakfast, and left immediately for Manchester. There was no trace of the couple when Oliver followed them to the station in the course of a quarter of an hour, intending to take a short journey on his own affairs.

Oliver Constable had his foot on a carriage step when the station-master hurried up, white and scared-looking, struggling to maintain his composure. He whispered to Oliver, 'There's been an accident to the 11.30 train north, close to Medlar Bridge. I've just had word. There's folk hurt. All that can help is wanted immediately; but there's no use driving the town wild, and bringing out a pack of useless, frantic people as long as it can be prevented. Would you mind, sir, coming with me and the nearest doctor and the surface-men?'

'All right,' consented Oliver, in reference to

what was evidently all wrong. He, too, was agitated by the suddenness and shock of the message.

It was not till the little party had started and aroused the suspicion of a few idlers, though another quarter of an hour would pass before the vague alarm took shape, spread abroad and thrilled the town, that Oliver recollected the 11.30 train north was the very train by which the newly-married pair were to travel. He told himself the next moment that amongst the hundreds in the train there was little likelihood that the Birts should be the particular victims.

The place where the last portion of the train had run off the line, with the usual amount of overthrow and wreck, lay about midway between Friarton and the next station, from which assistance had already come, before the Friarton station-master and his band of helpers arrived. Oliver saw only the *débris*

of broken carriages and a throng of excited but uninjured people, when he leapt from the engine, on reaching his destination. ‘Not so bad as had been feared from the earliest report,’ Oliver heard proclaimed by various voices immediately. Two of the smashed carriages were found to have been empty. Only one carriage and the guard’s van were occupied. A woman had been killed, and five or six persons more or less hurt.’

Oliver Constable passed through the eager speakers, looking on every side for the Birts, half expecting to find ‘Mily in hysterics if she had happened to be in a carriage near those which had broken loose, and if she had seen anything of the accident.

Before he was aware he found himself close to the waiting-room into which the sufferers had been carried. A railway servant at the door, taking it for granted that Oliver was seeking for the room and had a right to enter, beckoned him

in before he could think where he was going, among the doctors and their patients—fainting or groaning, while pulses were felt, heads bandaged, and limbs set.

Oliver prepared to retreat, but first he cast a quick glance round. Stay! Was not that Birt in the soiled, jaunty new clothes for which 'Mily had paid, out of her little bit of money?

'The man did not look much the worse, in spite of the outcry he was making over what a doctor was coolly pooh-poohing as a trifle of a broken collar-bone.

But where was 'Mily?

In another moment Oliver learnt the incredible fact that Birt did not know. The bridegroom had been smoking with the guard in the van when the accident happened, and ever since then—speaking from Birt's point of view—he had been in far too bad a way to enquire after anybody. But no doubt she was somewhere outside, gaping and screeching

with the rest of the women. She ought to be looked up at once—Birt grumbled crossly, taking the first word of scolding—to see if she could not make a beginning in minding her duty, and trying to do something for him when he was in mortal agony and as sick as a dog.

Oliver, with his heart standing still, took one step towards the door of another room which was kept closed. An elderly woman turned the key in the lock and let him go in. Alas! yes; there lay all that was mortal of 'Mily, the poor mangled body decently composed, covered over and put away from fascinated, appalled gaze, or rude, gloating scrutiny—in the very dress she had so often pictured herself as wearing, that she had bidden Oliver notice particularly, which she had, not three hours before, gone to church in. The chubby face was little altered, except for the closed eyes, since it had been spared, while death must

have proved instantaneous. With no friend by her side, not missed, though she was in her bridal glory, till Oliver sought her out, the disastrous end of 'Mily's foolish young life had indeed come swiftly.

In the grief and oppression with which Oliver set about making the necessary arrangements, he could yet believe that, as 'Mily had said of Fan's fate, so her own might have been more miserable still.

It was a wise choice made by the warrior and poet king—rather to fall into God's than into man's hands. To die in an instant, though it were on her marriage morning, in her bridal finery, when her heart was softened in the act of quitting Friarton, thinking as she thought in all probability—with regretful tenderness of her mother and family, and repenting of her misconduct, while, at the same time, all faith and hope in her husband had not been crushed out of her, was surely better than to live on

at the mercy of a man like Birt, to be dragged down by him into lower and lower depths, to risk becoming at last as heartless and worthless as himself.

Oliver had a worse ordeal to face before night than that of seeking out 'Mily on her marriage day, as the woman killed in the railway accident.

Mrs. Polley sent over an express to Friar-ton Mill to bid Mr. Constable come into the town and speak to her. In other circumstances it would have been an exacting, unreasonable demand ; as it was Oliver, like any man with a true man's heart, obeyed it as he would have obeyed the behest of the Queen.

He found the Polleys' shop with the shutters up in the middle of the afternoon, for the first time in his recollection. Mrs. Polley was not in the back shop ; she was in her daughters' room, to which she had gone, with rapid unsteady

feet, the moment a rash or stolid customer had pushed forward to the counter, and, in place of giving an order, had told the tragedy in all its raw anguish and frightful force, without waiting to weigh words, or to secure the presence of some solemnly commissioned, skilled, and pitying comforter. The mother was sitting by the side of the bed in which 'Mily had been wont to sleep. Mrs. Polley's hard-working hand was mechanically smoothing down the crochet quilt, which had been one of the few feats of industry accomplished by the joint efforts of the sisters while they were still at school, and in which 'Mily, though the youngest, had played the foremost part. The first married of the three workers was to have carried off the quilt, but the bargain had not been kept in spite of 'Mily's double title to the prize.

The heavy flush had not grown lighter on Mrs. Polley's cheeks. She continued dry-eyed

and silent, while all the eyes around her were dim, and the faces swollen with crying, and as Oliver—the last person there who had seen and spoken with 'Mily—entered the room, a fresh burst of lamentation broke from her sisters, even her father groaned aloud, and bowed his face over his shaking hands.

Oliver took Mrs. Polley's hand reverently. 'I am very sorry,' he muttered. 'She could not have suffered. She is in better hands even than in those of the friends who loved her best. I have done all that was required.'

'Mr. Oliver,' said Mrs. Polley, in a loud, harsh voice which startled everybody, 'I have sent for you in case I should not live another night. How do I know when them as I've seen full of youth and life and gladness is took in the twinkling of an eye? I want to thank you before I die, and I may never have another chance. Yes, I know all you have done for my 'Mily this day. You have stood beside her

—both as a bride and as a corpse. When every friend she had gave my gal up, and left her to be despised and trodden upon, when the mother as bore and had turned her adrift, that so her folly might grow into sin, showed no mercy, you came to her and let her feel she had one friend left on earth, so that she might be able to believe that she had still a Father and Saviour in heaven. You have ordered her coffin and undertook, if necessary, to pay for it, and are ready to see all that the cruel, grinding, tearing wheels left of her, laid in it, and to help to carry her yourself to the church-yard. Mr. Oliver, my thanks ain't worth much ; for aught that I know, they may be no better than ill wishes and curses, since I was the unnatural mother as shut 'Mily out into the street, where she had no refuge, save the base villain that had decoyed her from her mother's roof. Hold your tongue, Polley, and you gals, and you, sir, though you were thrice my pastor,' addressing

Mr. Holland, as he came softly and sorrowfully into the room. She resisted fiercely all attempts of her frightened husband and children and the other awed bystanders to stay her wild self-accusation. ‘I will speak out. I’ve sung my own praises and been my own trumpeter many’s the time. I’ll publish likewise my barbarous cruelty. It was I as denounced my own daughter and condemned her to destruction and an early grave. So what would it serve you, Mr. Oliver, though you were to let me go down on my knees and bless you, because you had more pity on my ‘Mily—my bright, clever ‘Mily, that is now as cold and still as a clod of the walley, than her wicked mother had on her poor, thoughtless child?’

‘You loved her better than yourself, all the time you blamed her most,’ Oliver told the miserable woman. ‘It was your very love for her, and pride in her, which made you hard. She knew that then ; she knows it better now.’

Something in the words spoken almost at random, opened the closed floodgate of tears which quenched the frenzy blazing into a devouring flame, and saved the stout heart from breaking. ‘Yes, I were fond and proud of my ‘Mily, with good reason,’ protested Mrs. Polley more softly, though the softness was expressed by the deep sobs which rent her breast, and the torrents of tears that gushed from her eyes. ‘There was none of the other gals fit to hold a candle to her. She were that smart, my little ‘Mily, she could run and speak by the time she was eighteen months. I’ve seen her a sitting up rosy and full of roguery, playing with the pillows in this here bed, when other children would have been lying like so many little logses. Her fingers and her tongue alike were that clever! She had finished her piece and begun another of this very bed quilt long before Ann or ‘Liza had got half through with either of theirs—and her the youngest and

only in her first quarter at the school. "I'll make them stand about, mother, she would say to me," with one of her merry laughs ; " and I'll wager I'll be married first, as well as first done with my bit of the crochet, and get the quilt all to myself." So she has been married first, and she has died first, leaving me and her father behind, as ought by rights to have gone long before her. Oh ! 'Mily, 'Mily, if I could but have died for you !'

Poor young 'Mily Polley's death on her marriage morning caused a great revulsion in the feelings which had been entertained towards her in her native town. Her awful fate wiped out, in human eyes, the sum of her transgressions. Her death was regarded—not so much in the light of retribution as of atonement. A tender veil of commiseration and charity was drawn over her offences till they were in a fair way to be forgotten as well as forgiven. Her memory was likely to survive in Friarton and

appeal to all gentle, romantic hearts for generations to come—not as that of the erring girl, but as that of the newly-made wife who perished in the first hours of her wifhood.

'Mily's intimate associates were forced to acknowledge remorsefully the little allowance they had made for her temptations, and the unanimity with which they had forsaken her in her humiliation.

Even some of the townspeople who had only noticed and inveighed against the girl as an exceedingly vulgar, pert, giddy creature, experienced an uncomfortable conviction that her opportunities of learning to become more civilised, modest, and steady had been limited, and, such as they were, might have been a good deal counteracted by the old feuds and jealousies between classes. At the same time the blithe ring of her voice as it had floated accidentally to them, the light fall of her footstep when she had passed them, lingered in the

ears of these judges, and smote them with the realisation of how young this 'Mily Polley must have been, when her detractors had not thought it beneath their superior age, rank, and refinement, to enlarge on her sins against good taste. 'Mily had her revenge in this fact, that whereas she and her set had been heartily despised, sharply ridiculed, and religiously shunned by those more gently bred ladies of Friarton, who held it as a pious duty to work for, bear with, instruct and assist the laziest and most reckless of the poor in the town, very few could now afford to scorn 'Mily. All except the smallest and grossest minds saw that the solemnity of death, even without its tragedy—as in 'Mily's piteous case—invested the girl with a simple dignity in her grave. But it was a pity that not more men and women had possessed the larger, gentler eyes to recognise that the sacredness of life had also bestowed on her worth and importance—even

while she still bounced about her mother's shop, and flounced along the streets.

Remorse, in its slightest manifestation of doubt and discontent with one's self, is not an agreeable sensation, therefore the townspeople of Friarton, who, like the rest of the world, greatly preferred to feel at ease in their own minds, if not gently titillated with a consciousness of having done their best in the matters of justice and mercy, began to look around them in order to discover any loophole of escape from the painful impression that they had been hard and contemptuous to 'Mily Polley and perhaps hounded her on—for girls are sensitive as well as perverse—to her undoing. They were remarkably successful in their search. For one man had, as it were, redeemed the humane character of Friarton. Oliver Constable had paid respect to the girl from the first, and shown her mercy to the last. He had acted as the representative of her neighbours, and so

removed, in a great measure, the lurking self-reproach from their consciences. And it was the same Oliver who had gone in for nursing old Dadd's son, and pulled him through his fever.

It did seem as if Oliver Constable had come home from watching by his sister's death-bed to save the life of Jack Dadd and to speak a parting word of forgiveness and God-speed to 'Mily Polley, so as to deliver the whole town from the charge of selfish cowardice and intolerant persecution. If so, what sort of man could he really be who had received such a commission and given himself to its fulfilment?

The reaction which had set in for poor 'Mily extended to Oliver. His fellow-townsmen commenced to conceive an altogether different impression of him, to exalt and make much of him, to canonise him—not merely before a hundred years had elapsed, but in his very life-

time. This experience is comparatively rare, still it happens sometimes that just as men's sins occasionally go before them to judgment, so men's patient continuance in well-doing is observed and awakens a response in their brethren before death has set its seal to virtue.

In the meantime Oliver was perfectly unaware of the sudden revolution in the sentiments of the town towards him, so that in place of being unpopular and lightly esteemed—not to say grossly slandered—he had sprung at once to the height of popularity and general respect, among those who were not particularly ashamed of thus turning their coats, after they had so recently decried and abused their champion and hero.

The only thing which struck Oliver as he walked along the streets of Friarton, in the drizzle and mud of November, was, that in spite of the season and the weather, he was con-

stantly meeting friends and acquaintances, and that not merely everybody had something to say to him, but that all men and women were in the best humour, overflowing with geniality, as if they were reflecting June sunshine rather than November fog.

CHAPTER XXXII.

‘DO THEY BELIEVE IN ME NOW?’

OLIVER CONSTABLE’S announcement that he was retiring from the baking business had appeared three times in the Friarton weekly newspapers. The first time it was received with scoffs and sneers, the next it was met by a troubled silence, the last time it was anticipated by an urgent protest, though Oliver did not happen to be within hearing. The earliest result of his advertisement—so far as Oliver knew—came in the shape of a formal call in the backshop from Jim Hull.

Jim had never entered the premises since he and his nephew ‘Arry set up a rival busi-

ness. Oliver made no question that Jim came now with some proposal from the flourishing firm of which he was one of the representatives, while he indulged in an austere satisfaction at the realisation of his own prophecies of the certain consequences of Oliver's new-fangled, hair-splitting scruples and crotchets. Any way, Oliver thought, Jim Hull might have saved himself the trouble. It was execrable taste in him to come and crow at all, in the circumstances.

‘*Et tu Brute!*’ Oliver said in spirit to his father's old friend and servant, who arrived to speak to Oliver of his acknowledged failure, and to suggest Jim's nephew's further rise on Oliver Constable's downfall.

Neither did Jim seem to prosper on his heartlessness and vindictiveness. He looked much older and greyer, and his fine, well-cut face was all creased over with the wrinkles which had been just perceptible, here and

there, two or three years before. The face had always looked compact, but now it had a contracted appearance, as if Jim had got into a habit of setting his few teeth and drawing his grizzled brows together, by the hour.

‘Master Oliver,’ said Jim hesitatingly, ‘will you not think twice of this resolution?’

‘I have no intention, Jim,’ said Oliver shortly, as he drummed on the table before him; and then, scorning to make use of a subterfuge, he added, ‘It is not in my power.’

‘Not though I bring you the earliest information that my nephew ’Arry is also giving up, leastways selling his business here?’ said Jim, leaning halfway across the table in his earnestness. ‘He has got word of a famous opening in London, which is a field as will suit him better,’ said Jim, in a lower tone, sinking back in his chair.

Oliver was taken by surprise. He could only say it would be odd if Friarton were left

without bakers, except the small fry. But there could be no difficulty in finding a purchaser and successor to such a *thriving* business as Jim and his nephew had established. Were there no other nephews of Jim's?—Oliver remembered a whole family of sons, cousins of Harry's—to take the place of the ambitious fellow who thought Friarton beneath his further attentions, and would, no doubt, die Lord Mayor of London? Oliver had—he could not have told why, unless in the underlying sense of bitterness produced by the contrast with his own experience—put an emphasis on the epithet 'thriving' which he had applied to Jim and his nephew's business.

The stress on the word caused Jim to wince. A dull, faded red suffused the old servant's withered face, and caused positive pain to the quondam master. What right had Oliver to taunt Jim with his success? Was not the old man at liberty to make his methods,

in which he saw no harm, succeed to the utmost of his power?

While Oliver took himself to task, Jim was informing him, ceremoniously, that the only nephew he had in the baking trade, besides 'Arry, had gone to Australia, 'and well for him,' muttered the speaker. 'But I was thinking, Master Oliver,' resumed Jim, wistfully, 'that you might take 'Arry's business, of which my share would go far to buy up the goodwill, and carry it on instead of the old one here.'

'What, Jim! because I have half ruined myself with the one, go on to wholly ruin myself with the other?' said Oliver, with a forced laugh to hide his perplexity and embarrassment.

'But things is different,' insisted Jim eagerly. 'It were the opposition—of which there would be no more, not a scrap—as did for you; and I would manage for you again, if you liked to have me. There's a deal more work left in

me yet than some folks think for,' Jim put in resentful parenthesis, flicking away the remains of flour from his sleeve. 'I'm not the man as would advise another man, least of all you, Master Oliver, if you will believe me, to fling good money after bad; but here is the finest chance as ever Providence made—on purpose, I had a'most said, for you to retrieve your losses, and build up Constable's business again on a firmer foundation than ever, and carry out your schemes to boot,' cried Jim, waxing enthusiastic, 'if you'll not go and fling it to the dogs in a pet.'

Oliver was fairly puzzled. He was a man tenacious of his principles and projects. So far from being wearied out by disappointment and thwarting, and glad of the excuse to throw the baking business over, it 'riled' him thoroughly, tortured and mortified him, to resign it and all the hopes he had set upon it, after what they had cost him. He was strongly tempted to catch

at the most distant prospect, consistent with common prudence, of resuming the trade, and waging it thenceforth to a triumphant issue, for the benefit of his fellow-men.

But what of the old practical difficulties with Jim? Oliver was not disposed to yield an atom of what he looked upon as trade righteousness. Sooner sacrifice half-a-dozen businesses, or promises of business, than make a holocaust of his trade creed, which was a prominent part of his Christian creed. Jim, with the hold on his master which the manager's having largely contributed to buy back the business must give him, would be in a position to maintain his opposite views, while Oliver would no longer have the power to object to them, far less to put them down.

‘I am greatly obliged to you, Jim,’ said Oliver, at last, ‘and not the least for this—that, in spite of the mull I have made, you speak as if you had some faith in me still. But I am

not cured of my hobbies; I am as great a fool as ever, you will think, when I tell you that I cannot be in business as a baker and suffer artificially-whitened bread, or fancy bread which is not weighed, to go out of my shop. Besides, I do not know what other eccentricities might occur to me, which I should feel bound to see carried out.'

Instead of the half-repressed disgust which Oliver had expected to excite, Jim met the declaration with a shame-faced assent. 'Never mind, Master Oliver, them are trifles after all, and it's erring on the safe side. Yes, sir, I'm bound to say to you this much—it's erring on the safe side,' raising his voice, and speaking sternly, while he fumbled nervously with his watch-chain.

With the exception of another abrupt sentence, 'I'll swallow all your stipulations, and stick to you like a vice, now, Master Oliver, never fear,' it was all the admission Jim Hull

ever made to Oliver of having found himself the wrong man in the wrong place. But it was enough to recall to Oliver's mind stories he had heard, only half believed and never repeated, of the sort of bread which the new business had gone on to sell in Friarton. A young doctor, who had taken upon himself the office of unpaid analyst in defence of an ungrateful public, had pronounced the bread largely and most perniciously adulterated. 'Arry had advanced a long way before his sickened and horrified uncle in courses which Jim had found himself utterly unable to restrain to mild, half-openly-confessed, traditional trade liberties. London was indeed a fitter field for 'Arry's genius.

The day has long gone by when the outbreak of deadly epidemics aroused the frantic outcry of poisoned wells and poisoned loaves. But are the water and the bread provided for the people really pure and wholesome? Has the time not come for the old charge to be

revived in more measured and reasonable tones, without any thought of vengeance on sins which are those of ignorance—however wilful—sloth, and haste to make rich, not of deliberate conspiracy and barbarous treachery against human health and life?

‘But, Jim, though you consent to bear with my fads, I am afraid the Friarton people will still find them insupportable. They will still clamour for bread of chalky whiteness, varying in size as well as in shape. I have wearied them out with my efforts to be honest and do them good against their will.’

‘No, you haven’t,’ said Jim decisively. ‘No one will wag a finger against your bread. They have come to know better. Bless you! they are ready to swallow wholesale any stuff you may offer them.’

Oliver stared, then thinking Jim was making another covert allusion to his nephew’s tolerably extensive experiments on the palates and di-

gestive organs of his customers, Oliver delicately waived the point in discussion.

Oliver Constable and Jim Hull talked for some time on the practicability of Oliver's stepping into a vigorous business in place of laying down an exhausted trade. The longer they talked, the more Oliver became satisfied of the possibility and advisability of the proceeding—that the career he had proposed for himself might not be cut short, and that he might have the chance of rising like a phoenix from its ashes.

The last thing which vexed Oliver was that Jim pressed him to go in for the new premises—reared by Jim and his nephew—which were in full working order, rather than transfer their business to the Constables' bakehouse and shop, which had latterly been only half used.

What! Give up the shop Peter Constable had proudly built for his son, which Agneta Stanhope had foolishly called 'the ancestral

shop,' with all the kindly associations to which Oliver was so susceptible, and remove into these brand-new premises, destitute of any association except that they had been raised to knock down the other, which they had done !

Yet all was true that Jim argued. Time and tide were sweeping away the old traffic from the old channels. The new premises were in a better situation than Oliver's. They had commanded ampler space and secured freer ventilation. They were more commodious and convenient. The spot on which Peter Constable built his shop had long been looked on with a covetous eye by those public-spirited citizens of Friarton who held that the town should have a new town-hall worthier of the name than that in which Oliver had delivered his lecture on Wordsworth, and Lady Cicely Hartley had been a stall-keeper in a bazaar. The town was flourishing in funds at the present moment, and the talk about the town-

hall was actually passing into deed. If Oliver were to sell the piece of ground on which his shop and bakehouse stood to the new town-hall committee, his exchequer would at once be considerably replenished. There was no resemblance between the shop and bakehouse and Naboth's vineyard. The former had seen their day and effected their purpose. Peter Constable would have been the first to pat his son on the shoulder and enjoin him, 'Sell, my boy; sell when it is wise and right to do it. My memorial, my idea! Never mind them. Would I have had them stand in the way of your progress, which is the progress of your work? They have taken care of themselves hitherto, they will live again like everything which has real vitality in it, in a new mould, shaped to the fresh needs of a later day.'

The treaty in hand between Oliver and Jim Hull was still unsuspected in Friarton when

Oliver found his back shop and his leisure a second time invaded—not by delegates from his journeymen bakers ; truth to tell, they were the last to comprehend intelligently and to give in anything like a cordial adherence to their master. It was a deputation from his fellow-tradesmen that next waited upon Oliver. The party consisted of old Dadd, Polley, who had enough manhood for a deputation in which his wife's bonnet and gown would have looked out of place, and another shopkeeper—the saddler, whose bill to Harry Stanhope Oliver had taken care should be paid in full.

They were so occupied with the ceremoniousness of their mission that Oliver could hardly get them to sit down or put their hats out of their hands ; and old Dadd, who was the leader, kept saying 'sir' to Oliver at every other word. They had not come to ask the miller and baker to go into the vestry or council as a step to becoming churchwarden or mayor.

They had no notion of giving him a dinner or a piece of plate—solutions to the formal visit which, luckily, never crossed Oliver's mind. They had come to more purpose.

These tradesmen—representing very nearly the whole shopkeepers of Friarton—the deputation had furnished themselves with a list of the names—were there to beg Oliver to withdraw his announcement of retiring from business. ‘We feel, sir, you are an honour to our order,’ said old Dadd, with as much spirit as if it were an order of knighthood. ‘Sir, we mayn’t all see with your eyes, or be prepared to carry out your views to a *t*, but we do see they does you great credit. We are quite sure, sir, the world and trade in the long run, would be none the worse of a few more gents like you in them. So, Mr. Oliver, to retain you among us, we, your fellow-shopkeepers in this here town, ’umbly and ’cartily solicit you to keep on your late worthy father’s

business. And we are here, sir, in a body, or as the representatives of a body, to pledge you our support in such plain reforms and improvements as you think fit to introduce. We ask you to excuse us for not being wide awake to their crying necessity from the first. Sir, men could not speak fairer,' wound up Dadd, in some elation at his own eloquence.

There was more behind. This flattering petition came from the general body of the shopkeepers, stirred up by their leaders, who, in their private capacities, had something else to say. It was Dadd, again, who acted as their mouthpiece, and, though not quite so fluent, was as fervent and 'earty as before. He remarked, abruptly, there were some favours no man with a heart in his breast could think of repaying, to which sentiment Polley chorussed incoherently, 'No, nor no woman with a heart in her bosom—quite so, quite so, Mr. Dadd.' Then old Dadd went on

to press on Oliver, in the friendliest, most considerate manner, such an advance in money as these three could afford, to tide him over the temporary difficulties which might have induced him to give up the baking business.

It was all clear to Oliver at last, while he shrugged his shoulders, grimaced fearfully, and stammered out his thanks, assuring the gentlemen there was no occasion for their last act of friendship, but he would never forget their generous sympathy and confidence, never. The truth was it warmed his heart, and he was not at all sure that if he had gone on to say this was the proudest moment of his life, there would have been the least hypocrisy in the trite hyperbole in his case.

Yes, it was pleasant to have won some appreciation—however little deserved—from his fellow-townsmen, who ought to know him best, to be assured that they gave him credit, after all, for meaning well.

The nature of the acknowledgment touched and softened Oliver more than he could express. He wished his father and Fan might know it. As he went out into the streets afterwards, he was sensible of breathing another air, of his face being irradiated with a different light. He was no longer surprised that he encountered so many friends, and that they were all so friendly. Of course they must see he felt that everybody was almost intolerably kind, till he could have wished they would not come round a beggar so, and demoralise him with their kindness. ‘Do they believe in me now?’ Oliver was saying to himself, half sadly, in the midst of his gladness, half incredulously still.

Oliver’s feet, like fate, at this crisis, carried him in the direction of the Meadows. All danger of infection from Jack Dadd’s fever was over, and nothing could be more salutary

for the reformer, to prevent his losing his head altogether, than the cold douche of Mrs. Hilliard's laughter, and Catherine's indifference, in contradiction to the absurd excitement of the rest of the inhabitants of Friarton.

But the instant he was shown into the Meadows' drawing-room—cheery even on a November day, Oliver discovered that the antidote he was seeking was useless, or rather that there was no such corrective. The town's dilatory admiration and gratitude were there before him, in all the excess in which they might be expected from women. Mrs. Hilliard's inveterate jests sounded very much as if they were uttered to save herself from breaking down, and her jolly voice grew shaky when she asked after Fan's baby.

With regard to Catherine, she might still have been silent and stiff, had she not been penetrated, stirred to the depths of her nature, and spurred on by a full share of the public

feeling. So much so, that when they were giving Oliver tea and he had cunningly worked round the conversation to a neutral topic—the new orders of nurses and the new theories of nursing—Catherine, her pale eager face, and eyes alight and aglow, with an expression which had all at once acquired a certain likeness to Fan's, suddenly turned round on him and told him barefacedly, with the clearest personal application—Sister Elizabeth's opinion was that her own work was good, but it was a better and nobler work to prevent the evils which took such costly sacrifices to cure them. When a man stood to his post, laboured to clear away his share of the abuses which had crept into all trades, and called nothing common and unclean—that was preventing great and widespread evils.

‘Oh, Gemini!’ groaned Oliver, gathering up his long legs in a marvellous coil which would have done credit to the brothers Daven-

port, 'don't you two go in with the others to make a fool and a hero of me!'

'Who shall prevent us?' cried Mrs. Hilliard. 'If the town take it into its thick head to give you its freedom on an exquisitely illuminated card—the illumination done by the most accomplished young lady in the place—or if it think fit to crown you with an olive-wreath covered with goldbeater's leaf, you will have to submit. It would never do for you to be ungracious, that would spoil everything.'

'Then don't let the town take it into its head. Upon the whole, you had better all suffer me to go away in peace, before you recover from your delusion.'

'It is not now we are deluded,' said Catherine. 'Our eyes have been opened, so that we—some of us, no longer see men and women—not so much like trees walking, but as hideous caricatures. We see plain at last, and recognise our kind—our kin, God-sib—our

gossips, if you will, as God made them, through what they have made themselves, or what their neighbours have consented to make them. Do you think so lightly of us as to imagine we shall ever forget the sight? Do you not know it is like life from the dead to recognise brothers and sisters—a great multitude which no man could number, wherever we turn? No, you will not have the heart to go away from Friarton,’ she finished, in a lower tone which was still audible to him, as she played with her spoon, ‘just when we are beginning to understand, and when God is going to show you the work of your hands, and to establish it.’

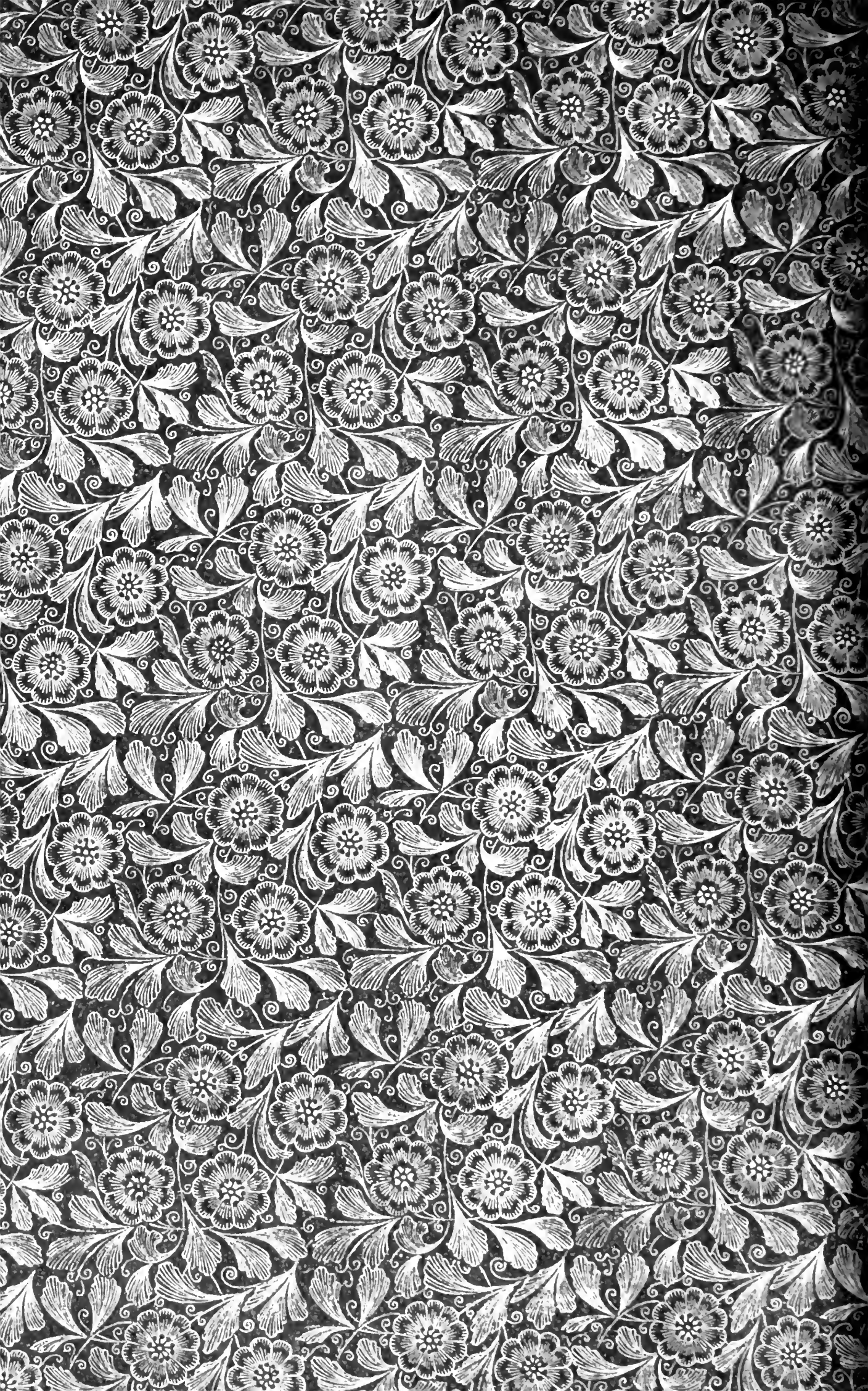
Oliver made an excuse to cross the room with his cup. On his return to his seat, he paused behind Catherine Hilliard’s chair, and said for her ear alone, ‘Take care, Catherine, or else you will be more cruel in the end than in the beginning’

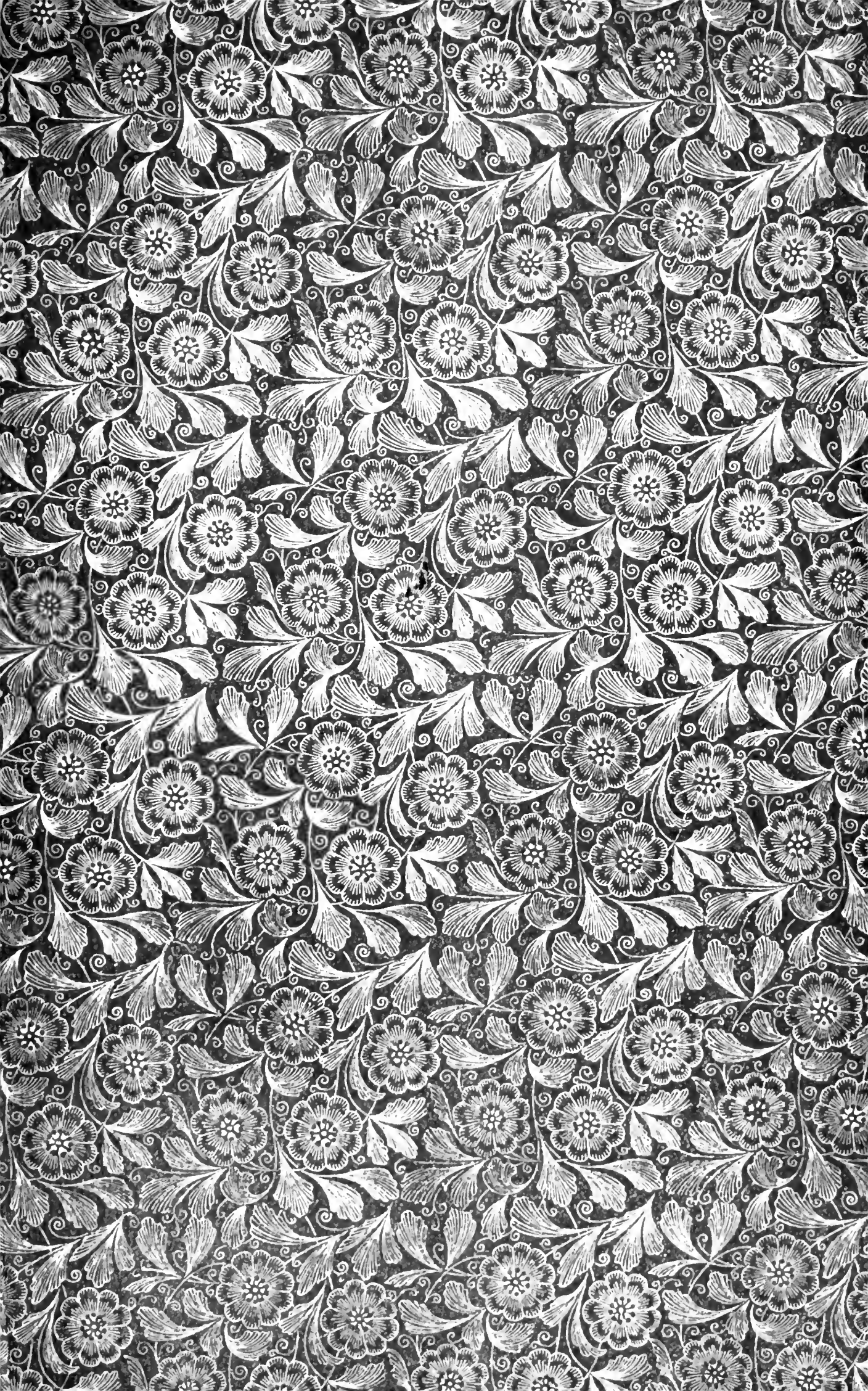
‘Have I been cruel?’ she asked, drawing back shyly. But this was the season of settling accounts, and he deserved full payment. ‘No, not to you,’ she whispered tremulously, with a soft smile. ‘If I was cruel, it was to myself—never to you.’

Mrs. Hilliard entered her protest, later in the evening; for Oliver stayed to dinner without troubling to go home to dress, and he was still lingering, talking, as he had never talked in his life before, after Mrs. Hilliard had reminded him there was such a ceremony as locking the doors in most households. Then she suggested, ‘If there are to be two enthusiasts, social reformers, muscular Christians—whatever you like to call yourselves—instead of one, and I’m sure one was quite enough to come to grief, what is to become of me, I should like to know? I shall have a bad time of it, for though Catherine is her own mistress, there is such a being as an indignant

ex-guardian, and I'm not her sole cousin. When all trades are held alike, and everybody is respected, half of my occupation will be gone, while my ungrateful kindred, whom I have suffered to set good, sound long-established social distinctions at defiance, will never admit a laughing hyena into their menagerie.'







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